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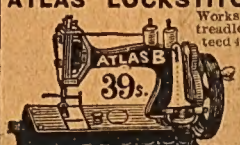

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SHORT STORIES

No. 656.] For the Week Ending July 27th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

He paused with terrible unmistakable suddenness. What was it he had been about to do? To tell this nameless girl—that he loved her. (See Nurse Eva.)

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

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NURSE EVA.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

A Complete Story. *By Mrs. Hungerford.*

A WARM, bright day in golden June, a crowded Park, a rushing of dainty wind, soft and pure, such as one seldom feels in this smoky London of ours; and over all a brilliant sun, grown drowsy now, as it seeks its rest, and sinks languorously into the fond arms of the evening.

The stream of carriages are growing thinner. One young man riding a handsome chestnut in a somewhat careless fashion, as though his thoughts were elsewhere, quits the Row, and turns towards the ugliest thing in creation.

Having reached the Albert Memorial he passes through the gate a little further on, and finds himself presently in the midst of a hopeless jangle, composed of cabs, hansoms, drags, and so forth.

Something in the jangle disagrees with the chestnut's temper.

She starts, throws up her sleek head into the very midst of her master's day-dreams, makes a false step, and comes heavily to the ground, flinging her rider, with a horrible crash, right under the wheels of a passing carriage.

It is all done in a moment. There is a cry from the bystanders, a vain attempt to make a clear space, and then a senseless form, soiled and disfigured with dust and blood, is raised by half a dozen rough if kindly hands, and conveyed to the nearest hospital. They pull the bell, and the door being opened, they enter with their ghastly burden, and lay it down within the hall. It is all that remains of the careless gay young man, so full of happy life, who had left the Park only a short time ago.

The house surgeon, passing through the hall at this moment, casts a sharp glance at the unsightly object on the bench.

"What is this?" asks he, and coming nearer, bends over it. His face changes. "Good heavens, it is Sir Rawdon Dare!" he exclaims, in a horrified tone. "Send the matron here at once—see what has happened," he says presently as a tall, handsome woman comes hurriedly up to him. His tone, though low, is agitated.

"An accident?" says she, stooping in turn, over the prostrate Baronet.

"And a very serious one. It is Sir Rawdon Dare. Is there a special ward?"

"One empty."

There is a touch of curiosity in her glance as she examines the death-like features beneath her.

"Let him be taken there. It is impossible he can be conveyed to his own house in his present state."

"It is a chance whether he will ever be conveyed there—alive," says the matron, turning away to give her orders.

"There is another thing," says the surgeon, detaining her. "He must have a careful nurse. You can recommend me one from the wards?"

"Certainly," says the matron, pausing as if to consider. There is a good deal of kindly interest in her compassionate, if somewhat austere, face, as she gazes at the poor crushed figure; just as kindly, however, would she have looked at him had he been the veriest beggar that crawls our streets. "There is Nurse Eva," she says hastily; "she can undertake the case. She is both careful and sympathetic."

And now the wounded man, mercifully oblivious to his pain, is carried by experienced tender hands to a small private ward, and laid upon a bed. The doctors cluster round him. A young woman in hospital cap and apron comes quietly into the room, and stands beside the bed. She glances earnestly at her patient.

Surely that poor blood-bestained creature can have no life in him? There is a long pause; then one of the doctors, who has been stooping over the senseless figure, lifts his head.

"He is not dead—yet," he says. There is little or no hope in his tone.

After a long sleep, as it seemed to him, the sick man woke. He lay silently gazing at the four white walls of the small room in which that strange sleep had taken place, but without wondering why he was there. Thinking, as yet, was too great a task; and so he put it from him. The window was open, and beyond, in the outside distance, there was a waving of green branches, and from still farther on there came to him the subdued roar of unsubdued populace. Inside there was some very curious furniture—or, at least, so he thought it, as his languid glance travelled over it—a huge branch of crimson roses on a small table, a wicker chair, and a girl.

The girl's head was turned from him towards the window. Her body also slightly bent in its direction. It occurred to him that she must be lost in thought. The idle way in which her hands lay upon her lap helped him, too, to this conclusion.

As he watched her, a little sooty sparrow perched upon the window-sill, and looked at her knowingly out of his small eye. She rose, found some bread-crumbs in a funny little cupboard, and returned with them to the window. Of course, when she got there the bird was gone. She seemed in nowise disconcerted by this, but sat down and fell back again into her former thoughtful attitude, and then presently not one but three little sparrows came and carried away some of her donation. She had not glanced at the bed when getting her crumbs, believing her patient to be dozing; but he, watching her with newly-opened eyes, had seen her face.

It was a revelation. It was beauty perfected. He lay quite still after he had seen it, dwelling with a drowsy pleasure on the remembrance of it until some minutes had gone by, and then a growing desire to see it again took possession of him. He felt still so weak and tired that he shrank from giving his voice sound, so, to attract attention, he clutched feebly at the bed clothes, and then made a sorry effort to tap upon the quilt.

In a moment she was alert and eager. She came quickly to him, and bent over him.

"Why, this is good news," she said, in a low, ex-

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quisitely soft voice, and with a smile, "you are beginning to be yourself again, are you not? No, do not answer; I know what you would say; I understand you quite."

She laid her hand with a soothing touch upon his forehead; she settled his pillows, and then, going to the door, pressed her fingers on a knob in the wall outside. This brought the house-surgeon to her in a few minutes.

"Come," said he cheerily, nodding to the patient, "this is well; you are to be congratulated, nurse. Our patient is getting on, eh?—eh?"

He said "eh?" a good many times in a pondering fashion, and then took the nurse aside and whispered to her in quite a confidential manner. As he did so, it occurred to Sir Rawdon, in quite a feeble inconsequent way not to be accounted for, that he hated the house-surgeon. Nurse, he had called her. With that face—a nurse. Of course she wasn't a lady, poor thing; but with those little white slender hands to be—a nurse. And with that charming figure and that high-bred—— "No, no thanks, old man, nothing more. See you by-and-by at Lady Stanhope's. Look out, Alys; those bull-terriers are often treacherous——" And so on, again falling into the old delirious state, and babbling over this Alys, whose name had been so frequently on his lips all through his illness.

The nurse was at his side again directly.

"You must expect these little relapses for a while," said the surgeon with encouragement, patting her kindly on the shoulder.

Then came a week when he felt much stronger and could lie contentedly gazing at his nurse with certain recognition in his eyes and no fear of its slipping away from him.

"When may I go?" he asked her suddenly one morning when she was giving him his breakfast.

His question was somewhat ungraciously put. He was, indeed, a little querulous at times; but she, accustomed to the vagaries of sick people, didn't appear to mind it.

"Not for a short while yet," she said. She spoke to him with the intonation one might use to a fractious child, and with a lenient smile. "Are you tired of us already?"

"Not tired of you—no."

"But you want to get back to the other life? Of course, it is only natural." Did a faint, faint sigh escape her here? "Your friends want to get you back there, too."

"It is hardly that," said he quickly. "It is more—that I want to feel myself—*myself* again. A *man!*—I am sick of coddling, and physic, and so forth."

This, too, was ungracious, and he knew it when the words had passed his lips. He glanced at her furtively, to see if he had offended her; and though he would have been miserable had he succeeded in paining her, he was still angrily disconcerted at finding she had taken no heed whatsoever of his petulance.

"It is a matter of indifference to her whether I am pleasant or the reverse," he said to himself, with a frown.

"I am afraid you must be content with us for a week or two longer," she said brightly. "But that should not be so great a hardship to you. In your present state, how could you be better off *there* than *here?*"

She was looking frankly into his eyes, and the beauty of her expression killed his small touch of rancour.

"I would be worse off," he said, flushing warmly; "I should be without my nurse."

"No; we supply nurses to private cases. You would probably have had one in your own home as good as I am," returned she calmly.

"Still, it wouldn't be you," said he. Then, "Do you like the life here?"

"Yes."

There was as much No as Yes in this answer, and it puzzled him.

"It is a hard life," he said.

"Most lives are hard," returned she sententiously.

This checked him for a time, but the demon of curiosity having made him his prey, he was compelled to go on again.

"What is your name?"

"Nurse Eva."

"I know that. I shall never"—gratefully—"forget that. But your other name, I mean."

It had tormented him inconceivably in his sick moments to think it might be Smith or Jones.

There was a short, but eloquent pause. When it had gone by she turned and looked him fairly in the face.

"I have no other name," she said icily.

She got up from the seat, and moved towards the window.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," exclaimed he, horror stricken with shame at his mistake. "I assure you I didn't mean it—I—"

"If you excite yourself you will have a relapse, and not be able to leave us as soon as I have said," interrupted she, with increasing coldness. "Think of the misery of that, and compose yourself."

A suspicion of scorn in her manner checked further speech on his part. He turned on his side and feigned slumber. But he could not get her face out of his thoughts. That last little touch of hauteur had become her. Strange to say—for one in her class—it had suited her, and had seemed to belong to her of right. What a brute he was to ask her such a question. Surely she had a right to her own secrets; and yet—yet he wished now her name had been honest Jones or Smith, and that she had been able to say so.

But he had angered her, and could not sleep without her forgiveness. He was still so weak that sleep at all times was essential to him.

"Nurse," he said presently, in a tone that reminded him of the days when he was a schoolboy and in disgrace.

"Well," said she.

"I—am very sorry I said that," mumbled Sir Rawdon from beneath the bedclothes, "it was abominable of me."

He had now evidently come to the point when a good sound caning was reasonably to be expected.

"You want me to say I forgive you," said Nurse Eva softly, coming up to him again and looking down upon him. "Very good—I say it. Now go to sleep."

"You don't look as if you forgave," protested he anxiously. "If you could only know what I feel about it. You must think me so contemptible—and you so kind to me—and——"

"If that is all, be comforted. I do not think you contemptible," returned she; and even as she spoke a sweet soft smile overspread her lovely face, falling like a healing sunbeam on the repentant invalid.

With a sigh of relief he closed his eyes, and sank into a refreshing slumber.

Then came a day when his nurse entered his room

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with a very jubilant air. Perhaps it was rather too jubilant an air.

"Rise, prisoner," she said; "the hour of your release has arrived."

He answered her with a reproachful glance, but no word.

She laid the little breakfast tray upon the table near, and began to busy herself with its contents.

"It seems a shame to give you any trouble, now I am so strong again," he said. "And yet—I like to see you doing that."

"You like to see me getting your breakfast ready? A very sensible fancy."

"You misunderstand me," he said hastily, and then stopped abruptly. It was difficult to go on with those large, clear eyes fixed coldly upon him. And, after all, what was it he wanted to say? Yet the very repellency of those eyes only made some vague, unanalysed feeling within his breast the more unendurable.

"Eva," he said suddenly, with a vehemence that suggested hidden passion.

She laid her tiny teapot down slowly, without a suspicion of agitation, and turned her eyes fully upon his.

"*Nurse* Eva!" she said, with indescribable dignity.

She then gave him his tea, and arranged the tray as carefully as ever before him. If her hand trembled a little, she took very great care it should not be seen.

As for him, he seemed dissatisfied with all she gave him, and toyed discontentedly with his food, and finally told her, almost rudely, to take it away from him.

"This is foolish," she said gravely. "You will want strength for your removal. Try to eat something."

"The very thought of my removal takes away my appetite," retorted he sullenly, rejecting with angry persistence the little dainty trifle she sought to press upon him.

Then the surgeon came in again, and felt his pulse, and asked a question or two, and went through the usual formula.

"All going on as well as we could wish," he said at last. "You have, indeed, made a wonderful recovery my dear Sir Rawdon. Give you my word, there was a time—eh?—eh? Well, and so the carriage is to be here for you at twelve? Hah! glad to run away from us, eh?—eh?"

"Is it safe for me to move to-day?" asked Sir Rawdon languidly. There was no languor, however, in the deep anxiety of his eyes. "I don't think I feel so well as I did yesterday."

"Eh? what? Pouf! nonsense, my dear sir!" said the surgeon gaily. "Invalid's tremors, nothing more. I tell you, you are getting out of our hands more hopefully every moment. We shall be ashamed to prescribe for you soon."

"Perhaps if my going were to be postponed until——"

"Not at all—nothing of the kind. The very change will do you good," said the surgeon cheerily. "Come, come now—speak to him, nurse."

"But supposing I should have a relapse—that would be unpleasant," said this remarkably careful young man.

"Eh? How is this, nurse?" said the surgeon, somewhat perplexed by his patient's pertinacity.

As he appealed to her, Sir Rawdon raised himself slightly on his elbow, and appealed to her too—with his dark eyes. Her glance, passing from the surgeon's face to his, rested there for a moment.

There was entreaty, longing, hope, and something far more than all those in his gaze. She turned away from it slowly, but resolutely.

"There will be no fear of a relapse," she said to the surgeon, in cold measured tones, her eyes bent upon the ground. "It is better, far better he should go to-day as arranged."

A swift change altered the expression of Sir Rawdon's face. Whereas before it was almost imploring it was now proud and stern.

"To-day, then, be it, by all means," he said, in a decided tone. "The sooner the better;" after which he sank back with an angry jerk upon his pillow.

The surgeon laughed a little, and presently went away.

The nurse busied herself in tidying the already scrupulously tidy room.

"In what mad haste you are to get rid of me," said Rawdon at last, finding the silence unbearable.

How cold, how calm, how unfeeling she appeared with that beautiful unreadable face of hers.

"You see I have your interests at heart," she said.

"Mine?"

"Yes. Do you forget how you were pining for your freedom only a short two weeks ago? Now it lies before you."

"You are ungenerous," he said. Then more slowly, "A fortnight is a long time. One may learn many things in it."

"True, you have learned to get well," said she quietly.

"More than that." He flushed a dark red, and held out his hand to her. "I have learned besides to——"

He paused with terrible, unmistakable suddenness. The colour died from his face, and a quick pallor succeeded it. His very lips grew white because of the severity of his mental struggle.

What was it he had been about to do? To tell this nameless girl—this worse than nameless girl, who was ashamed to declare aloud her honest appellation—that he loved her? To ask her to be his wife? He, a Dare, and the head of his house!

His hand sank once more to his side, he breathed heavily, and at length, without looking at her, turned his face from her to the wall. Here a bitter strife took place between his heart and him, but when it was ended his heart remained the victor, and he roused himself and looked round for her.

Of her, however, he found the room empty. During that short but violent battle with prudence and affection, in which prudence had been slain, she had left him—had vanished, as it were. In her chair sat a probationer, a young woman with pale eyes and a snub nose, and a generally afflicted air. He had seen this probationer before. She spoke with a little snuffle in her throat, and was otherwise in many ways most hateful to him.

Now, the knowledge that Nurse Eva was never absent from him for longer than thirty minutes at a time became an intense consolation to him. She would soon be here, and that odious young woman would vacate her chair, in which it seemed a positive sacrilege that she should be allowed to sit. But the minutes crept on, and the half-hour grew into an hour, and the hour into two, and still the probationer sat on, and Nurse Eva made no sign.

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The dragging hours were at first a bore to him, and at length became intolerable. And when the probationer rose, and declared it was time for him to rise, as the carriage would soon be here, and when a nurse from another ward came to assist her, he was almost rude to them both.

But time was inexorable and wore away, and at last the carriage was announced, and two or three of his friends and relations came in to congratulate him and help him down to it. The house-surgeon was present also, looking really pleased at his recovery. To him Sir Rawdon turned with a somewhat hurried air, and an amount of passionate anxiety he vainly tried to conceal.

"Where is Nurse Eva?" he said, his voice trembling slightly; "I cannot go until I bid her good-bye, and thank her—thank her for——"

He stopped, and cleared his throat huskily.

"I'm afraid you can't see her to-day," said the surgeon, cheerfully. "She has been somewhat overworked of late, you see; so when she asked the matron, a couple of hours ago, to give her a holiday to take a run down to Putney, or somewhere, you may be sure she got no refusal. The matron—indeed we *all* think a good deal of her, and she did seem pale and fatigued, poor girl, when she came down from your room about ten o'clock. I'm glad the day is so fine, both for your sake and hers. She said, by the bye, that you were so thoroughly convalescent that you would require her services no longer. She seemed to me in bad spirits — a little o.ver-done, no doubt."

"No doubt," said Dare.

He said even this with difficulty. Of course he understood it all! That brutal hesitation of his! What woman but would have taken fire beneath such an insult.

His manner in itself was unbearable, presupposing as it did that if he uttered his proposal it would of a surety be accepted. With what sweet dignity she had behaved! She had uttered no taunt, had looked no scorn. She had only withdrawn herself, and taken measures to insure herself against

"I will not. If your life and heart and title were all at my feet now I——"

They are at your feet."

"Then I reject them," she returns with vehemence.

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the annoyance of ever being face to face with him again.

But it should not end here. Of that he was determined. He would at least see her once more and compel her to believe that when his craven wavering had drawn to a close he knew himself to be hers, body and soul.

He got down to the carriage some way, and was driven home.

But he was a good deal knocked up by the exertion of removing and suffered a slight relapse that kept him to his bed for a week or so. The old familiar scenes were now, too, changed to him, and touched him as being barren and wanting in many ways.

When he rallied a bit, and found himself in possession of a little of his former strength, the first use he made of it was to drive to the hospital. He was shown into the matron's room, where he thanked her cautiously, if a little absently, for the care conferred upon him whilst under her roof. After that he said casually that he thought he should like to thank his nurse also.

It was with a paling cheek he said this, and with eyes downcast.

"Nurse Eva?" said the matron. "Oh, she left us a fortnight ago. We were all so sorry to lose her, she was such an excellent nurse. I am sure you too. Sir Rawdon"—with a smile—"will have a good word for her on that score."

"Left!" It was all Sir Rawdon could say.

"Yes, almost the day after you did."

"You know her address perhaps?"

When he asked this, he felt like a drowning man grasping at a straw, and he knew the straw would fail him.

"No," said the matron regretfully. She thought him a very kind young man. Gratitude, as a rule, is not an overpowering passion with the many. "But do not fret about that," she said. "I am sure she understood that you would wish to thank her. Yes, she was an excellent nurse—so sympathetic; we were sorry to lose her."

Sir Rawdon rose to bid her good-bye.

"I suppose Dr. Bland would not know her address?" he said.

"No I am sure of that. She went away very suddenly—for family reasons, as she told me—and left no word with any one as to where she was going. Good-bye, Sir Rawdon; so glad to see you thoroughly restored," &c.

Sir Rawdon, returning her farewell, told himself he was not so fully restored as she kindly imagined, and that his strength was by no means what it used to be.

* * * * *

It is a year and a half later, and Christmas Eve. There is no suspicion of invalidism about the handsome young man who, sitting in a first-class carriage with a rather bored expression on his face, is being whirled swiftly northwards.

He had checked his journey by spending one day in Edinburgh, and he felt it dull in the extreme. Even now, when he is hastening on to Aberdeen, the stupidity of his lonely stay there has not worn off.

But he is always dull now, he tells himself, with a disdainful shrug of his broad shoulders, and grows moodier and moodier, until, his journey coming to an end, he finds himself on the chilly platform, with two gleaming carriage lamps awaiting him.

The drive is a long one, and bitterly cold. The change from it to the soft brilliant warmth of a huge hall, hung with many skins and bristling with antlers, is almost more than he can endure with fortitude. As in a dream, he follows the servant across the hall—rose-lit from the two large shaded lamps upon the dark oak staircase beyond—and valiantly suppresses a desire to stay beside the huge log fire for ever.

But the servant mercilessly marches him onwards, and presently he finds himself in a long, low, many cornered room full of people, all more or less in the reposeful attitudes that border upon sleep.

There is a soft sweet subdued hum of slumberous voices, a tender tinkling of delicate china, the music of many spoons.

There are no rose-lamps in this room; nothing but the leaping light of a glorious fire that renders all things clear as day. The divan-looking lounges are covered with tartan, so are a good many of the men, and only a few of them have their nether limbs covered.

Sir Rawdon, still unthawed, stares idly round him. There is a pretty girl in a voluminous arm chair, who nods brightly to him—Miss Adair; and another crouched picturesquely upon the bearskin rug before the fire, who stops her chatter for an instant to gaze at him curiously, and ——

Good heavens! who is that? Who is that sitting over there, with *her* face, *her* figure, the very hands of *her*.

A slender creature, reclining in a low chair, and clad in an exquisite tea-gown—all satin and old lace. She is smiling. One arm, half naked, but mittened to the elbow, is lying gracefully across the arm of her lounge as she leans towards her neighbour; the other is trifling idly with a huge white fan.

Even as Dare gazes at her, spellbound, she laughs, softly, merrily, at some remark made to her by her companion—a red-headed young Scotchman. The laugh somewhat restores Sir Rawdon to his senses. Alas! *she* had never laughed; her lovely face had always been tinged with a deep melancholy. What madness possessed him to make him think he saw again before him the one woman he had ever loved—the only one he ever should love? And to dream of meeting her here, of all places! A hospital nurse as a guest at The Towers, in that gown, that——

"Dear Sir Rawdon, so glad!" says his hostess—a tall handsome woman—at this moment, coming languidly forward with a smile and a graceful gesture. "So nice to see you again."

Sir Rawdon murmurs something to the effect that he is positively overpowered with joy at the idea of seeing *her* again; but his words sound vague and unmeaning—to himself, at least—and his eyes are not his own to deal with; they wander incessantly to the low chair and its lovely occupant, and will not be controlled. Who *is* the owner of that tea-gown?

"I think you know everybody," says Lady Dalruth, at the end of a long sentence, not one word of which he heard.

"Not quite all. I have not the happiness of knowing your pretty friend on the hearthrug, or—or the lady in the low chair over there."

"No? Well, time will cure that. The latter is my cousin, Miss Monteith. You would like to be introduced to her? Come then."

"Evelyn, dear, let me introduce to you Sir Rawdon Dare," she says a moment later.

Miss Monteith, turning slowly, lifts her eyes fully to

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Sir Rawdon's, and, after a calm comprehensive glance, makes him the faintest salutation.

If he had ever seen this girl before, it is certain that she showed no recognition of ever having seen him. There is no surprised start, no faintest blush, no betraying pallor. Her little bow is cold in the extreme, but, nevertheless, civil. She answers his rather agitated remark with the utmost composure, it is some ordinary thing about the beauty of the scenery round, and hardly requires any acknowledgment save a bare "yes," to which she confines herself. If, indeed, some wild freak of Fate has suddenly changed the Nurse Eva—for whom he has been so persistently searching during all these past interminable months—into this stately, repellent girl before him, she is so clad in an inpenetrable armour of reserve that he cannot pierce it.

And, after all, is it she? Could even Fate play such a trick? Is not all this some cruelty of his imagination, born of his long dwelling on one engrossing desire?

Once or twice during the evening he tried to speak to her, but though she always answered him very gently, still her manner was so cold as to check on every occasion further conversation.

Dropping into the background after a last defeat, he finds himself close to an old beau, a certain Sir Harry Loune, who is well-known to everybody, and to whom everybody is known.

"Wouldn't look at you, eh?" says this old gentleman, with a chuckle. "Don't take that to heart, more than you have got the same tale to tell. She won't look at anyone, not even at the best *partis*. Pretty, isn't she? Good form, eh? Thing of the season next year, I shouldn't wonder. Lady Dalruth wanted right or wrong, to introduce her this year, but she wouldn't hear of it. Seems to shrink from publicity. No wonder too; beauty has made itself so dooced vulgar of late," says the old gentleman, with a shrug of disgust.

"Yes?" says Dare calmly, but his look is in itself a question.

"She's charmin'—charmin'," goes on Sir Harry, when he has refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff, "and mysterious as she is lovely."

"Mysterious?"

"Rather, my dear boy! Mustn't say a word about it, you understand; but when she was about eighteen, her father, Sir Pagan Monteith, you know—eh—what? Don't want to know? Ha, ha! Very good indeed! Well, he wished at that time to force her into a marriage with a most dilapidated person—an earl, notwithstanding—quite old enough to be his father. Girl wouldn't hear of this sacrifice at any price, and when pressed to it by angry parent, bolted—no one knows where, unless Lady Dalruth may. For three long years she remained incognita. Odd affair, isn't it? Nobody can explain it."

Dare thinks he could. Again the belief that Miss Monteith and his sweet nurse are one is full upon him; but he refrains from making his thoughts known to this old gossip.

"Why can't she say where she was, eh?" says Sir Harry, in a distinctly aggrieved tone; "this deadly silence is very injurious to her, eh?"

"Why should it be injurious to her?" asks Sir Rawdon fiercely.

He turns upon the old baronet with open wrath in his dark eyes. It is insufferable to hear her name bandied thus from lip to lip. And yet— Her name? Whose name? If he lets this madness overpower him, what will the end be? What has that haughty beauty over there to do with his gentle nurse?

Seeing Sir Harry's look of amazement, he hastens to change his tone.

"She looks too proud to be a subject for calumny," he says confusedly, almost apologetically.

But the old scandal-monger has found him slow, and in nowise a kindred spirit; so he hobbles away from him to where Lady Dalruth is standing. Dare, too wearily disturbed in mind to find amusement in his present surroundings, follows his movements with idle uninterested eyes, but presently is attracted by something he hears him saying to his hostess.

"Left him at the point of death," said Sir Harry unctuously, "as he thought; but it was nothing of the kind. Gordon recovered almost immediately. One of the Gordons of Clayne, you know. Fellow who upset him was a cousin, and thought to come in for the property, d'ye see."

"One of the Gordons of Clayne" is a bosom friend of Sir Rawdon's, so naturally he pricks up his ears.

"What did happen to him?" asks Lady Dalruth, looking interested.

"Oh, mere trifle! Nothing vital, at all events. One fellow told me it was a broken clavicle; another, a fractured humerus; but I haven't the faintest idea what either means."

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"You should ask Evelyn for a translation," says Lady Dalruth, with a merry laugh.

Miss Monteith, who had been listening silently to the conversation, turns her eyes upon her. Is there entreaty or simple indifference in her glance? If entreaty, it comes too late; Lady Dalruth does not even see it.

"Miss Monteith?" asks Sir Harry.

"Yes. Didn't you know she has studied medicine, surgery, and all the rest of it?"

"You terrify me," says Sir Harry, with mock horror.

"That is quite a correct feeling for the occasion. She is terribly learned. Aren't you, Evelyn?"

She smiles at the girl, as though in pleasant appreciation of a jest that is known to them alone. But Miss Monteith's return smile is forced and very faint.

"Learned? no. But I really have some taste for that sort of thing," she says quietly, and then turns away, as if anxious to terminate the conversation. In so doing, her eyes meet Dare's.

There is a pause, in which each regards the other with strange anxiety. Then the blood slowly mounts to Miss Monteith's brow, until all her lovely face is dyed a warm crimson. Her breath comes quickly, she wavers, then, with a last defiant, contemptuous glance, she moves away and sinks into a chair at the opposite end of the room.

But to Dare there is no longer even a chance of doubt. Just so has she looked at him when, in a moment of passion, he had called her "Eva" in the hospital, and she had coldly corrected him, just so, no doubt, her large, scornful eyes had rested upon him during that last fateful hour, when he had half declared his love, and had hesitated—and been lost.

With a terrible sinking of the heart he tells himself that he has sinned past forgiveness in her eyes.

The next morning all the world is clad with snow. The soft white fleecy carpet is covering the land far as the eye can see, and is lying heavily on branch and bough.

The Christmas bells are chiming merrily. A soft grey mist is trembling between earth and sky, Over all, the merry sun is shining gaily. It is indeed an ideal Christmas morn.

Luncheon has come and gone, and they are all standing before the glowing fire in the billiard-room discussing the costumes to be worn at a fancy-dress ball, to be given in the neighbourhood some time in the ensuing month.

"One gets so tired of the art rags and the past centuries' gowns," says Lady Dalruth dejectly. "Oh, for something new, something *bizarre*, out of the common!

"I'm sure I don't know what is to be done about Evelyn. She and I are quite worn out trying to imagine a costume that all the world hasn't seen a hundred times before. The anxiety has robbed me of honest sleep for a fortnight past, I have so set my heart on making a success. But each of my ideas only seems more crude than the last. Dear Sir Rawdon, do suggest something."

An uncontrollable impulse takes hold of Dare. He glances at Miss Monteith, to find she is looking full at him that dreamy touch of scorn that had offended him last night now wide awake within her large eyes. It spurs him to his half-determined purpose.

"Why not try the dress of a hospital nurse?" he says to Lady Dalruth, pale but smiling. "I don't recollect having ever seen it at a ball before, and I think the pretty little cap and apron would suit Miss Monteith admirably."

"Sir Rawdon! What can you know about hospital nurses?" says a pretty girl from the opposite side of the hearth-rug, with an amused laugh.

"Didn't you know I was in hospital for many weeks—summer before last—when I smashed myself up?" returns Sir Rawdon distinctly. "I don't think I shall ever forget the kindness I received there; and at all events I know I shall never, under any circumstances, forget—my nurse."

"Ah, gratitude is a charming virtue!" says the pretty girl, with a second laugh. "Was it her cap and apron you were thinking of just now?"

"Yes. They are indelibly imprinted upon my brain." Again he glances at Miss Monteith. If she has grown a little whiter it is at least only perceptible to a lover's eyes.

"Do you know, the costume sounds well," she says quite calmly. "Let us think of it, Mirabel," turning to Lady Dalruth. "It is the one thing you desire—out of the common."

Lady Dalruth's answer is a little confused.

Miss Monteith looks full at Sir Rawdon, her eyes dilate, and

> "Oh, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful
> In the contempt and anger of her lip!"

With a little passionate movement of the hand, unseen by all but him, she crosses the room with slow graceful step, and disappears through the doorway.

It takes Sir Rawdon but a moment to invent some idle speech, that leaves him, too, free to quit the apartment without arousing suspicion of the real motive of his departure.

Finding himself in the hall, he comes to a standstill, and asks himself what is it he means to do. He cannot forget that last glance of hers, or the passionate anger contained in it.

He feels he would give half his possessions to be able honestly to hate her, and yet knows, by the sheer impossibility of his being able to do this, that he loves her.

As he stands irresolute, one of the footmen passes through the hall. Then and there a sudden resolution comes to Sir Rawdon.

He will go to her, tell her all—lay bare his heart to her, and if it must be, hear from her own lips the "No," that will blast his life for ever. Anything will be better than this crushing suspense.

"Where is Miss Monteith?" he asks the man as he goes by.

"In the library, sir. Saw her go in just now."

Opening the library door he enters the room, and finds himself alone with her.

She is standing at the far window, and with a little start acknowledges his entrance. He would have gone to her, but with a certain impulsive eagerness she too moves and meets him half way. That her late anger is still warm within her eyes is known to him at the first glance.

"So—now you know me," she says defiantly, "are you satisfied? Is your curiosity satiated?"

"I knew that from the first moment. Was I likely to forget?"

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

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"That is the bitterness of it," she says. "Are those three sad years of my life never to be obliterated?"

"From my mind, never! The few weeks I claim out of them were the happiest of my life."

"What brings you to me now?" she demands suddenly "Is there more you would still learn as to the why and wherefore of my going into hospital as a nurse? I warn you I shall give no explanation."

"I do not desire one," says Dare humbly; "I know all about it. Your father's tyranny; your escape from a marriage with that vile old man; your life in hospital—everything. Do you hate me the more because I know all this?"

"Hate you—no!"

There is studied contempt in the curl of her lip.

"Hatred is a strong sentiment; what I feel for you is only indifference."

She goes back to her former position in the window, as though to terminate the interview. But he, having "cast his all upon the die," makes one more effort for dear life. He follows her there.

"Even the worst criminals get a fair hearing," he says. "Let me plead my cause."

"No. It would be waste of time."

"At least, tell me of what I stand accused."

"Listen, then!" exclaims she, turning to him with flashing eyes. "When unkind Fate sent you to that hospital a year and a half ago, and you saw me there day after day, a mere nurse, and—as you believed—unknown and obscure, you deigned to fancy yourself in love with me. Your momentary infatuation went even so far, that as the hour approached that was to put an end for ever to our intercourse with each other, driven by some puerile impulse, you deemed it even possible to declare your love, and offer me your name. But when it came to the point, you quailed; you drew back your half-uttered words; you shrank from allying yourself with one beneath you. My feelings were as nothing to you. Knowing myself scorned, rejected, without being afforded so much as the poor gratification of being able to refuse you, I left the room hoping, praying I might never see your face again. Do you think," with a painful sob, "I shall ever forgive all that?"

"Hear me."

"I will not. If your life, and heart, and title were all at my feet now, I——"

"They are at your feet."

"Then I reject them," returns she with vehemence.

"As you will. But at least you shall listen to what I have to say in my defence," says Dare with dignity. "That morning of which you speak—my last in the hospital—I truly meant, as you say, to tell you of my love."

"Meant! And then—you hesitated."

"I did," said Dare simply. "My name and the honour of my house is dear to me. Is it a crime beyond forgiveness that I should have paused before offering that name and honour to a woman who, though the most beautiful and lovable in the world, was still—unknown?"

"Why should you seek to excuse yourself?" interrupts Miss Monteith haughtily, "I know all that."

"There is, however, one thing that you do not know. You saw that I did battle with myself that morning, but you did not wait the termination of it. Love and duty fought a hard fight, but when it was over, you—that is Love—had won the victory; I raised my head again to tell you all—to beseech you to be my wife, but you were gone. Later on I searched for you everywhere; I advertised, all to no purpose. For eighteen months I sought for you—in vain."

Her face is turned away from him now, but a faint sound, that is either a sigh or a protest, escapes her.

"About all this you must believe me or not, as you will," says Dare quietly. "I have only my simple word to give you, but it is at least a word that has never yet been dishonoured. Will you not say something to me?"

"All I have to say has been said long ago. I cannot forgive you," says Miss Monteith, but as she says it she bursts into tears.

"I will not accept such words from your lips," exclaims Dare, with deep agitation.

And then all in a moment his arms are round her and his cheek pressed to hers.

"Beloved," he says, "have pity on me! Just think of it! You who have a name as old as mine, can you not understand the struggle I endured?"

"I can," murmurs she sadly; "and—yes, I honour you for it. But——"

Here her voice fails.

"Oh, if you could only know what I suffered!" she says, sobbing bitterly.

"I do know it. It was just half what I suffered," returns he, gravely. "Oh, darling, put an end to my misery now—here! Of the two I am the more to be pitied, because if you still prove unkind my unhappiness will last for ever. Eva, speak to me."

"Evelyn," corrects she softly.

"Ah, of course. But you must remember how long you have been 'Eva' to me. What an eternity lies in that year and a half! The very length of my wretchedness should buy my pardon."

"You are a special pleader," whispers she; and then she makes him a present of an arch little smile, and a glance from under her drenched lashes.

"Tell me you love me," persists he.

"I cannot yet. There is first something——"

"Nothing that shall separate us," declares he stoutly.

"There may be. Who—who was that 'Alys' you were always raving about during that dreadful time when you were ill?"

"Alys! My sister of course," says he triumphantly. "Had a letter from her only yesterday. She has been in India with her husband for the past four years, or probably you would have seen her at the hospital during that lucky time when I was ill. Now, what have you got to say?"

He is fast waxing into the wildest spirits.

"Nothing," returns she demurely; "so now let us go back to the others."

She makes a movement as though to go to the door, but he seizes her.

"Oh, yes, there is something!" he says, "and you shan't go without confessing it. Now then—you will marry me?"

"Yes."

"Soon?"

"Ye-es."

"And you are sure you love me?"

"As sure as sure can be!" says Miss Monteith solemnly, with a shameless disregard of maidenly reserve.

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

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THE FOOL.

A Romance of Provincial France.

THE fete of the little Brittany ville of Chateaulin was in full swing. From miles around had come the vendors of those things that are necessary to the fullest enjoyment of the day with their wares, and in their scores had flocked holiday makers from neighbouring villages; all merry, all happy, dressed in their Sunday best.

It was in the market place that the crowd was thickest, for here congregated the merchants, and of them all, none had claimed, perhaps, more attention than he who came not as a vendor, but to buy.

An envious, feminine crowd surged before his booth—women, old and young, middle aged, of the working class, and mostly peasants; and they jostled each other with the usual humour of holiday folk in their endeavour to approach nearer to those good lengths of muslins and calicoes, those fascinating bonnets, those handkerchiefs of silk of many colours and all brilliant, which constituted the purchasing powers of the many who had come to buy.

"Sell your hair, ladies, sell your hair," he invited, and he held those brightest flowered foulards right where the sunlight fell, and swayed them gently to and fro; now took a bonnet and placed it mincingly upon his black head; now displayed more of these rolls of cloths and calicoes and muslins that the country-woman might handle them the better.

And the women folk gazed at the bizarre finery, especially the younger ones; lingering over this or that article fondly; and from fingering the goods a hand here and there crept towards the head and entwined itself in the hair bunched thereon.

"Sell your hair, ladies, sell your hair."

The *coupeur* ran his business eye—an eye that was pleasant and invited confidence—over the crowd of faces that looked alternately at him and at the merchandise he so ostentatiously made show of.

"We take it short or long, black or white, grey or chestnut. Sell your hair, ladies, for a fine bonnet or a length of good calico, or what you will that I have."

"Ah, my dear," sighed one old dame who had tramped a dozen kilometres from her village, "that I had hair like yours."

She addressed her remark to a girl of eighteen summers whose face was crowned with a wealth of auburn hair that her *coiffe blanche* could not hide.

"I should buy that beautiful length of calico there; how I should like it."

But her hair was thin and short now, and of no decided colour; too thin, too short, and too mixed for the hair merchant to take at any price. It had bought many a bonnet and many a length of calico ere the grey streaked the black, for she was now well on in years.

"It grows again quickly, my dear," she went on, as though begging the loan of a few locks. "Oh, that I was young again!" and she felt beneath her bonnet with her skinny fingers and heaved a sigh.

"Sell your hair, ladies, sell your—Ah! that bonnet for you *ma chère?*" One girl had lifted her white cap from her head, and taking out the hair pins, her coiffure fell to pieces on her shoulders. The hair merchant felt her locks and eyed them critically. "Well, I don't know if it's worth it," he said, the artful rogue, knowing full well its real value was forty francs, and the bonnet cost not more than two, "but just to start business."

The girl stood on one side. She was soon joined by others, and together they laughed and joked.

"Ah! if I was only *La Petite Blanche*," said one. "She carries a fortune on her head."

"I have heard," said another, "that *le tondeur* offered her a hundred francs for her hair last *jour de pardon*."

"But she's proud, she won't sell it," said another.

"Proud, and a lot she had to be proud of. They are as poor as——"

"But," interposed another, "why should she sell if she doesn't want to? And I don't think they are so poor. *Mère* Durant has Jules in Paris. He's doing well there, too, I hear. Another year, and perhaps he and Suzanne are to be married."

Soon a dozen *chevelures* were waiting the pleasure of the *coupeur's* shears—a dozen heads of hair that would soon each find itself part and parcel of some grand lady's coiffure in Paris or elsewhere.

It was not long ere the women had passed in the chair under the *coupeur's* scissors and were shorn of their crowning glory, each rising to feel the happier in her possession of a much coveted silk neckkerchief, worth at the outside a franc, or a bonnet of little higher value, or a metre or so of calico or cloth.

When there was no further business to be done the buyer of hair packed up his booth, placed his newly-acquired spoils carefully away, hitched his horse to the trap and left. He was off to the town not far distant where there was a depôt of his patron to whom he sold the hair for hard cash or exchanged it for further merchandise.

He wondered he had not seen *La Petite Blanche* at the fair. He had ever an eye for her wonderful head of hair, and every time his gaze rested upon it he was tempted to turn thief and acquire by violence what he could not come by honestly.

His very heart ached at the thought of the hundreds of francs he would make was that hair but his. For had he not a purchaser ready waiting for it, the rich wife of Pelloux, the Parisian banker, who told him she would pay three thousand francs for such and such a coil of natural hair?

That was two years ago, but she still waited, for none of the many hair merchants who travelled the country had been able to satisfy her requirements. The *coupeur* knew that bit by bit, Raoul the great *postichor* of Paris, was getting a coil together; a thread or so now and then from Normandy, from Vendee, from Brittany, and he sighed as he thought he might lose the profit.

The hair was of the sort the most rare in the world—pure white and waving down a length of nearly thirty inches. Suzanne had not been blessed with it at birth. It was the result of a great fright she underwent when five years old. And with the change in the colour of

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her hair she passed from being Suzanne into *La Petite Blanche*.

Now she was nineteen and lived with *Mère* Durant at Poyran, had lived there ever since her own mother had followed her good man to the grave, lived there and played, and grown up with Jules, the fatherless son of Madame Durant. And Jules was now in Paris—had been there two years and was getting on well in life. At Saint Jean he was coming home for his holidays, and his mother talked and thought of nothing else. And in his weekly letter he spoke of hopes of marriage and a home with his old mother in the capital.

And Suzanne sighed and was happy, till came one Monday which brought no letter from him; miserable when came another and still no letter, and the *coupeur*, stopping on the way past their little cottage—he had purposely made a détour to see if time had changed the mind of *La Petite Blanche*—found her and her foster-mother plunged in misery; so miserable that much as he thought of those lovely francs he had no heart to try to persuade the girl to sell hair. He never even mentioned the subject, but learning the cause of their sorrow, laughed and tried to raise them from it.

"Here, *ma petite*," he said, pulling from his strap a bundle of folded newspapers, "read these and be happy. The course of true love never runs smooth. And, mother," to the old dame, "the lad's all right I'll wager; working hard as he's coming home soon. I'll wager, too, he has written, perhaps his letters have got lost. Anyway I shall be in Paris next week, and I'll look him up and scold him. There's a lovely new romance just commenced in the Journal, *ma chère*," to Suzanne, "read it and the time will pass the quicker."

The girl in no mood for reading, took the papers, thanking him, threw them on one side.

"I suppose you are going to the *Pardon* at Carhaix to-morrow," she hazarded.

"No, I am resting. Just going to Aune to arrange my business. Now, cheer up," and with a *bon jour* he was gone.

To drive her thoughts from their sombre course, Suzanne presently turned to the numbers of *Le Petit Journal* which the hair-buyer had left, and perused therein the new feuilleton. She could read and write, and was proud of the fact, though of many words she didn't know the meaning, while her writing and spelling were no evidences of high scholarship. But then, in the village no one could read better, and no one could write better, and seldom did either, for not all of them had sons in Paris sending them money, but had to slave from dawn to dark for their poor living; and he would be rich, indeed, who could have afforded the luxury of candle light to read by.

She finished the story so far as it went and wondered how the heroine could escape from the villainous hands of her husband, who was slowly poisoning her with arsenic that he might marry a certain little dressmaker whom he knew was heir to millions and who loved him dearly, unawares that he was married. And wondering she turned to the news, reading the suicides and

The hair merchant felt her locks and eyed them critically.

Hand on "Short Stories" to a friend, and do the Editor a favour.

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murders, and love affairs, and thefts. Suddenly she seemed petrified where she sat, her eyes glazed, the type danced before them. Her Jules a thief and in prison! It could not be. And yet here it was in plain type. He had robbed his master of a thousand francs! It was impossible!

She turned to the date of the paper. It was two weeks old. And he had not written for over two weeks. He was to be brought up for trial three days from now. There could be no mistake.

She looked across at his old mother nodding peacefully in her chair, dreaming perhaps of her boy in Paris, a great man, earning lots of money; and Suzanne fell to the floor in a faint.

When she came to, her head reeled. The old woman still slept. It was growing dark. She sat up and again read the terrible news contained in a paragraph of four short lines. It was true. If his old mother knew. It would kill her.

She must be spared the knowledge. Luckily she could not read, and if she had been able to, her eyesight was now too bad; luckily too, no one in the village had read.

If they had known that piece of information she would have heard it ere this.

She tore the paragraph from the paper and held it in the flame of a match.

That night she slept not. She sat through the dark hours on the edge of her tiny bed and rocked too and fro in tears.

To save him, her Jules; that was her one thought. A thousand francs! What a fortune! How could she help to gain it?

It was beyond her. Both her hands flew to her head. There was the price of his liberty. Her hair flowed down on her shoulders. She looked in the tiny mirror on the wall.

She loved her hair, because Jules loved it; how often he told her the fright she would be without it. But what mattered it now? He was in danger, in prison, and might be kept there years.

The buyer of hair would be at Aune on the morrow he had said. He was there now. When it was daylight she would go to him.

He had offered her twelve hundred francs once for her hair. That had been his last offer. Then she was seized with a horrible fear. Why had he not spoken on the subject yesterday? Perhaps he no longer wished to buy her hair. She felt sick at the thought, and she shivered.

When the light came she would make to Aune. She would run all the way. She must see the hair-buyer ere he started off again. With the first streak of dawn she was away, waking the *mère* to tell her she was going. The old woman dully wondered why, but she never asked; Suzanne often made these excursions.

She returned in the afternoon, but not through the village street. She came to the cottage by way of the fields, for she wished to avoid everyone, but some children playing there saw her, and running home to their mothers told them that *La Petite Blanche* had lost her hair.

Mère Durant was astonished and angry, and the more because Suzanne placed two hundred francs in her hand and said she had given the rest to the Monastery.

"I confessed to a great sin to the priest," she said. "This is my repentance. And then we have no food, and Jules has never written and sent you money. That two hundred francs will last, no doubt, till we hear from him."

In her anger the old woman threw the notes at her, and she went upstairs and cried, and cried, and cried.

The hair-buyer set out for Paris with his much prized coil of hair. An intimation of his business soon gained him admittance to the presence of Madame Pelloux, and three thousand francs and the hair changed owners, the latter being at once dispatched to the cleaners.

"And now I've a favour to ask of you, madame," said the hair merchant, the business completed.

She signified her willingness to listen to him, and in his plain matter-of-fact way he stated his case.

"Your husband has in his employ a clerk named Durant," he said.

"He had," she interrupted, "he is now in prison; a thief."

"I know," he replied. "The girl from whom I bought this hair is his sweetheart. She lives with his old mother down in Brittany. I could never persuade her to part with her hair. But she came to me two days ago and asked her price for it. She confessed to me her lover was in prison. He had stolen a thousand francs of his employer's money. She was coming to Paris to plead with the employer herself and pay him back the money. She sold her hair, not knowing for whom, for of course I never said, and I told her I was going to Paris and would see the banker for her. She waits now in an agony of fear to hear from me. Will you, madame, can I pray of you to intercede with your husband to set this young man free. Here is the money he stole;" and he put forward the notes for a thousand francs.

The woman had a woman's heart, and there were tears in her eyes when the man had finished. She had a son and daughter of her own.

"It shall be done," she said.

"And she doesn't wish the young man to know anything about this."

"He shall not."

Jules was with his mother and sweetheart in four days' time.

His employer had forgiven him his crime, talked to him of the sin of gambling, given him a thousand francs and told him to go away and be a better man.

He told himself going home he now could marry Suzanne—*La Petite Blanche*—and live happily ever afterwards. But when he saw her shorn of her beautiful hair, his soul revolted in horror. And she had done this for charity!

He called her a fool, and it angered her.

"A fool for your sake," she said.

He coloured and shivered. Could she know he had been in prison? It was impossible.

"Where is your beauty now?" he asked.

"In your pocket," she said.

A fear gripped his heart. He understood now, she knew. He knew, now, the sacrifice she had made, and would have drawn her to his breast, but she repulsed him.

"She doesn't know?" he asked, pointing to his mother.

"No; she, too, thinks I'm a fool."

"No, no, forgive me, Suzanne," he cried.

And she forgave him.

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"A" or "B"? *A Story of Diplomacy.*

THE ambassador looked at me and I looked at the ambassador. It was not by any means the first pause in an exceedingly awkward conversation.

"You see," he remarked suavely, "you also are concerned in this affair. I am glad to observe that you contrive to retain your cheerfulness, but I am bound to point out the fact that—diplomatically, at any rate—you are in a parlous state."

I assumed as lugubrious an expression as possible and ventured to contest his point of view.

"I don't exactly see——" I began, but he stopped me.

"Perhaps not. I will explain. If I am—what shall we say?—removed, my first secretary will certainly go with me. He is supposed to be equally to blame when anything goes wrong; he shares the reward when a small triumph is gained. Now, you are my first secretary, Hamblin, and we are in the devil of a mess; in your own interests I should recommend you to bestir yourself."

I drew a little breath. If I had not been in a way attached to my chief, I should certainly have used it for a different purpose.

As Sir George had remarked we were certainly in a devil of a mess, but it was he himself and alone who had landed us there.

"If you could suggest any way, sir, in which I could be of the slightest use," I remarked deprecatingly, "nothing would give me more pleasure. Unfortunately, we seem to be sitting down before a great wall; it's too high to climb, and there's no way round."

"A very charming simile," Sir George said dryly. "Nevertheless, if you don't get over yourself, or help me to, you won't marry my daughter."

I came to the conclusion promptly that Sir George was an unreasonable and disagreeable old man, but I kept my convictions to myself.

"I hope you will reconsider that, sir," I said most respectfully. "I am very fond of Clara, and I think she cares a little for me."

"Work for her, then," was the prompt answer. "Here's your chance. Get us out of this wretched muddle, and you shall have her—as soon as she likes!"

I pondered. I was very fond of Clara. I began to wish that the situation were not so hopeless. Sir George took up his penholder and marked time with it.

"The affair," he said, "lies in a nutshell; it is as simple as A B C."

"Oh, it's simple enough," I assented—"painfully simple!"

"England," the ambassador continued, ignoring my interruption, "is at war with the Transvaal Republic. Last week there appeared in an issue of a foreign newspaper what purports to be an interview between the monarch of this country and the European representative of the Transvaal Republic. The interview—or, let us say, purported interview—you have read yourself. It is sufficient to remark that, if it was authentic, it was tantamount to a declaration of war against England. Now, you know what an artful old beggar Highbury is! He sends me across by Queen's messenger two sealed dispatches for the Emperor, addressed to him privately. One is marked 'A,' the other 'B.' Now, if the interview had been genuine, I was to have dealt the first blow by presenting 'B,' which is tantamount to an ultimatum, couched in most formal and war-like language. If, on the other hand, its authenticity is denied, I present 'A,' which is a friendly little note, assuring his Majesty that no notice was taken in England of what was obviously a ridiculous canard. You know, of course, what has happened."

"The Emperor has denied the whole story contemptuously from beginning to end," I remarked. "The Transvaal representative was never even accorded an interview."

Sir George flourished the penholder with new vigour.

"Precisely. I accordingly left at the Palace the letter marked 'A,' and, returning here, proceeded to open and destroy letter 'B.' I read it first, and to my horror found that its contents were as per specification of letter 'A,' and that, consequently, the lettering must have been wrong, and the ultimatum left at the Palace."

"I don't quite see where we are to blame, you know," I interposed.

"Perhaps not," my chief remarked dryly. "You see, you are very young. But there is an axiom in diplomacy which you will do well to lay at heart. If anything goes wrong at your charge, no matter who is to blame, you are responsible. Those letters have been changed by spies, most likely, and I think I know who is at the bottom of it. It was probably done while they were in the possession of the Queen's messenger—he admits that he took no extra precautions. That is of no consequence. It is upon us that the blame will fall. There awaits the Emperor a letter which will either plunge us into a ruinous, unnecessary and unpopular war, or else will mean Highbury's resignation, our retirement to a colony, and a most awful climb-down."

"The Emperor," I remarked, "is still at Meritzburg."

"Manoeuvring?"

"Yes he returns to-morrow. To-morrow night that letter will be handed to him."

"You're sure it hasn't been sent on to him?"

"Certain. I happen to know that his commands were most absolute. Nothing was to be forwarded. Von Butz has the letter, and knows its contents."

"Sure of that?" I ventured.

Sir George tossed an evening paper over to me.

"You see what the beast is doing," he said. "Strange rumours at the barracks, all-night work at the arsenals, mysterious notices to the railway companies. It all means one thing—mobilization."

"Von Butz has read the letter by fair means or foul. The Emperor will receive it in person to-morrow night. The letter awaits him at Von Butz's house," I remarked, thoughtfully.

"Marvellous!" Sir George remarked with sarcasm. "You have the insight of a Mazarin."

One must put up with sarcasm from one's prospective

Hand on "Short Stories" to a friend, and do the Editor a favour.

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father-in-law, especially when he is in a tight place, as Sir George undoubtedly was. I had sufficient magnanimity to ignore it.

"Have you made any effort to regain possession of the letter?" I asked.

Sir George shook his head.

"I might as well try to fly," he said, "as attempt to regain possession of it by fair means. Von Butz is our enemy and the enemy of our country. All the ill-feeling and friction of the last few years has been his making, and his alone. This letter is the summit of his desires. In the light of the Emperor's frank and downright statement, it is nothing more or less than a brutal insult. I cannot imagine any apologies which could possibly be offered sufficient to atone for it. It will mean war for England, and the colonies for us."

"If the Emperor reads it," I remarked softly.

"If the Emperor reads it," Sir George repeated, looking over at me.

I buried my face in my hands and tried to think. There came a knock at the door, and a telegraphic dispatch. Sir George fetched out the code book with shaking fingers. He groaned as he read it out.

Understand mobilization secretly commenced. Panic on Stock Exchange, owing to rumours from Merlin. Presume you only delivered letter "A." What does it mean? Have you blundered? Reply. HIGHBURY.

"We haven't much time, have we?" I remarked. "Let us make the most of it."

"How?"

I took up my pen and code book, and wrote a telegram.

To Highbury, Downing Street, London.

Discredit all rumours. Mobilization ridiculous. All quiet here. Duly delivered letter 'A.' Probably stock exchange rig. Will request audience to-morrow.

"We'll start boldly, at any rate," I said, rising. "Send this and I will be back in an hour."

"Where are you going?" Sir George asked.

"To call on Fräulein von Butz," I answered.

Youth is dauntless and excitement is sweet. So I walked through the broad, sunlit streets of Merlin with a smiling face, a cigarette of delicate flavour between my lips, and tried to persuade myself that it was not a forlorn hope upon which I had embarked. In my pocket was letter "A," which should have been marked letter "B," in my right hand a fragrant bunch of Neapolitan violets, whose faint, sweet perfume had stolen out to me from a florist's shop in the avenue. As I passed up the broad steps of the mansion where Von Butz lived, the Fates did me a good turn. The door before me opened and Fräulein von Butz came out, dressed for driving.

I bowed low and held out the flowers.

"A farewell gift, Fraulein," I said sadly. "You will deign to accept them, I hope!"

She held out her hands, and her bright smile of welcome changed to a look of interrogation.

"I will accept them," she said, "with very much pleasure, and I thank you indeed for thinking of me. But why a farewell gift, Mr. Hamblin? Are you going away on leave again?"

I shook my head sorrowfully.

"It is no matter of leave, dear Fräulein," I said. "I am quitting the service. I should have left to-day, but I wanted to say good-bye to you."

She turned back into the hall.

"Come inside," she said, "I do not understand."

I heard her instruct the hall porter to send back the carriage. She led me into her own tiny sitting-room, as neat and dainty as herself, and motioned me to an easy chair. She sat down close to me, and loosened the furs from her neck.

"You are giving up the service," she said, "you are leaving Merlin? Is it not very sudden, Mr. Hamblin?"

"It has come upon me," I said gloomily, "like a thunder-clap."

"You shall tell me," she insisted, raising her bright eyes to mine, "all about it. Have you come into the title, is your health bad, or are you promoted?"

I was silent for a moment. It was my silence which told. Then I shook my head.

"Fräulein," I said, "when I have gone you will hear from others what I would rather tell you myself. I have longed for this opportunity, yet now it has come—it is not easy."

Her piquant little face was full of sympathy. By accident my hand fell upon the arm of her chair and touched her fingers. She drew them away—slowly.

"Fräulein," I said, "there is one profession in the world in which a single mistake is fatal. That profession unfortunately is, or was, mine—and that mistake—I have made."

"Oh!" she cried.

It was enough. My humiliation now required no pretence. It came natural to me. I felt that I was a cad.

"Won't you tell me a little more?" she begged. "I am so sorry for you—and sorry that you are going away."

Her hand once more fell upon the arm of her chair, Never were fingers more soft and velvety to the touch.

"Fräulein," I said, "if I may tell you, I will. I should like you to know the truth. It is this. Two letters were intrusted to me, one of which was to be delivered to the Emperor, the other destroyed! I delivered—to your father as it happens—the wrong one."

She was perplexed.

"Is that all?" she asked.

I nodded.

"The action," I said, "is a small one—but the result is terrible."

"Terrible?"

"It is too weak a word," I assented. "Do you know what war means, Fräulein?"

She shuddered.

"Do not speak of it!" she begged.

"You will hear it spoken of before long, Fräulein," I said; "and, alas! I shall be the unhappy cause. War between your country and mine! It is fearful!"

I am afraid my fingers tightened upon hers. I am sure that the pressure was returned.

"The letter you spoke of," she asked—"has the Emperor received it yet?"

"Not yet," I answered; "your father has it. The Emperor returns to-morrow night."

She leaned forward suddenly, pale.

"He returns to-night!" she exclaimed. "Only an hour ago my father had a telegram from him."

"To-night or to-morrow night," I muttered—"what matters. The letter is gone from my hands beyond recovery. He opens it, reads, and war is as certain as to-morrow's sun. Oh, it is enough to make a man mad to think of it! War between the two nations who have

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brought the science of killing to perfection! It will be the greatest massacre the world has ever known, and the everlasting shame of it will be upon my head."

"Don't!" she cried—"please don't!"

I drew myself up.

"At least, Fräulein," I said gently, and with real tenderness, "I have no right to come here and make you miserable. Only I could not go away without seeing you and asking you to sometimes remember—a most unfortunate man!"

I stretched out my hand for my hat. She stopped me.

"No, no!" she cried. "sit still! Let me think."

I watched the colour come and go from her cheeks. She pushed back the pretty fringe from her forehead. Ah! Gertrud von Butz, you wrote the memory of your dainty little self into my heart for ever in those few minutes!

She turned toward me.

"What if the letter were destroyed?" she asked slowly.

"It is impossible!" I answered, with thumping heart.

"But if it were!"

"There would be no war," I said, "there would be no disgrace for me; I should remain in Merlin. But it is impossible."

"Should you know it if you saw it?" she asked.

"Of course."

She rose up.

"Come with me," she said. "Do not speak. If we meet my father it would be a convent for me. You must do what seems best to you."

She was as pale as a sheet, but she walked firmly and without hesitation.

As we crossed the hall where several servants were standing she turned to me.

"Your own conservatories," she said, "are so much more beautiful. But there, you shall judge."

We turned off down a long passage. At the end was a conservatory, but she paused and listened at the last door on the right. It was empty; she turned the handle.

We passed inside; she took a bunch of keys from her pocket and unlocked a cabinet which stood in the middle of the room. A pile of letters were there. My head swam with joy.

"Quick," she whispered. "Ah! We are lost. It is my father."

I dashed at the letters, seized a handful, but dropped them again as the lid of the cabinet fell upon my wrist. She whirled me across the room, behind a curtain into a long annexe into the conservatory. I could have cried with the disappointment. But for her sake, I would have rushed out and torn the letter to pieces before Von Butz's eyes. Gertrud came close to me. I passed my arm round her waist; she was trembling violently.

Voices approached, and footsteps. The door of the room opened. Through the crack in the curtain I saw Von Butz enter, and my heart stood still. For behind him came a tall, familiar figure in a brilliant uniform, partially covered by a long military cloak.

"And now, Von Butz, the letter at once," he exclaimed brusquely.

"Your majesty shall have it," was the quiet answer, as Von Butz produced his keys.

"When you read it you will say that I have done well in starting the great engine which your Majesty has constructed with such marvellous and wonderful forethought."

There was a moment's pause. Then I saw the letter pass into the Emperor's hands.

"You yourself, Von Butz," I heard him say, "are well acquainted with the contents?"

"My secret agents," Von Butz answered, "ever keen in the service of the Fatherland, borrowed it from the King's messenger, and brought me a copy. We have saved hours which are worth millions."

The Emperor broke the seal. He stood up and a fierce light burned in his eyes.

"Von Butz," he said, "you will be my witness that these things which are to come are of God's ordination, not mine. With the finest army in the world, trained and brought to perfection under my own care and governance, I, the certain master of this great continent from the firing of the first guns of battle, have ever refrained from violence or provocation. With the warlike spirit of my grandfather in my veins, I have yet held out to all nations the olive branch instead of the iron grip. History must acknowledge this. When I am all conquering and almighty, I have yet been slow to strike. You will remember this, Von Butz."

"Always, your majesty."

The Emperor tore open the letter and bent over it with serene forehead and expectant eyes. He read, frowned, re-read, and flung it passionately upon the table. He turned upon Von Butz with a fury that was paralysing.

"Dolt! Fool!" he cried. "You have been tricked! You have made me a laughing-stock! You have betrayed the nation!"

"Your Majesty," Von Butz faltered, "the copy I sent you was a faithful one. My agent copied it himself in the express."

"Listen then," cried the Emperor.

He read out letter "A."

* * * * *

I walked home, my nerves tingling with excitement, relieved, but very puzzled. Sir George called me into the study immediately I arrived.

"Hamlin," he said in an airy manner, "I'm afraid you have been disturbing yourself about a mare's nest!"

"Oh, indeed!" I found breath to say.

Sir George nodded and tapped an open letter with his finger.

"It seems," he continued, "that Bucknell, the messenger, is rather a smart fellow. He found out that his dispatches had been tampered with, so wired Highbury for instructions. Immediately he received them he destroyed letter 'B' and duplicated 'A.' The duplication was to catch the thief, if possible, and I should imagine that it did."

"I should think so, too," I answered, smiling.

"One word more," Sir George said, coughing, and assuming his most dignified deportment. "With regard to Clara, I have talked to her seriously, and found her, as I expected, amenable to reason. You are both too young to think of marriage, and an engagement does not seem to us desirable. In short, we have other views for Clara."

I drew a long breath—not of despair, but of resignation. That night, at the Russian embassy, I sat out four dances with Gertrud von Butz.

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

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The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Otto Hare would like to suggest that he did—Esther's mercenary mother accepts his hints. She wants the Golden Dwarf for a son-in-law.

Felix is secretly loved by Judith Garland, a striking brunette, Lady Dering's companion. She has a wastrel brother, Neal, who is unaccountably in Wyresdale, and who is demanding money. This, by an affectation of sisterly solicitude, Judith obtains, as a cheque, from Felix Dering. The cheque is payable to bearer.

Otto Hare has an ally, a strange German physician, Joseph Kraft, who lives with him at Wyresdale Park, the Golden Dwarf's residence. He is an object of much curiosity to Archibald Geddes, a clever assistant at the Wyresdale Pharmacy, which is kept by a drunken old chemist, Caleb Forester.

Caleb has a charming daughter, Connie, whom Geddes is making bashful love to. She is Esther's friend, and quarrels with Geddes for crediting the rumour that Felix killed his uncle.

A one-armed sailor has suddenly appeared in Wyresdale. At the chemist's shop he encounters Kraft, whom he follows, and on the strength of some past episode attempts to blackmail. Kraft repulses him, but is dexterously tracked by the sailor to a curious fort-like structure in Wyresdale Park.

While spying on this the sailor is attacked by a huge dog, which he stabs. He is seen by Kraft and the Golden Dwarf.

Esther tells Felix of her mother's plan to marry her to Otto Hare. They swear constancy in an old and picturesque oath. Felix returns to Dering House, to be asked by the child Brian if it is true Felix has taken his father away.

Judith Garland shows Felix several links of a chain he has been in the habit of wearing. They are bloodstained. She adds that they were found near the cross roads, where Sir Christopher's body was discovered, and that, moreover, Felix was seen near the place at ten o'clock on the night when he was supposed to be in Duchester. She assures him she will keep his secret.

Felix in vain protests his innocence. At this moment an inspector of the local police is announced.

Felix Dering staggers—is he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounds in his ears; Judith Garland is speaking to him. "Don't look like that," she whispers, "pull yourself together."

Notwithstanding their alarm, the police-officer—one Inspector Brasher—has merely called to arrest, on suspicion of being concerned in Sir Christopher's death, a certain Edward Spencer, a young Irish groom whom the baronet, shortly before his death, had given notice to leave. Protesting his innocence, Spencer is taken away. While on the route to the little country police-station, he was seen by Foley, with whom Dr. Kraft has been holding a mysterious consultation. Almost immediately afterwards, Foley, by chance, makes the acquaintance of Neal Garland. "Here, my hearty," asks the sailor in his maritime lingo, "what was it you picked up yonder and gave to the taut little craft you had with you?" He is referring to the meeting of Judith and Neal at the stile.

The scene changes. During a walk in the meadows on a pleasant Sabbath morning, Felix tells Esther that he was indeed in Wyresdale that fatal evening, and explains his return. A new sensation interrupts their conversation, Felix is called to the small local police-station. It has a single cell, and in this Ted Spencer had been confined over an adjourned inquest. This cell is now empty, Spencer has vanished. The barred window has been broken through—from the outside!

With the help of Neal, Esther kidnaps little Brian Dering, to further her ends with Felix.

The Golden Dwarf pesters Esther with his attentions. She meets Felix one day, and from his manner guesses there is something amiss.

CHAPTER XII. (*continued.*)

"Felix," she faltered; "something dreadful must have happened."

Her lover assented, yet by a gesture rather than speech. Esther experienced an indescribable terror.

"Tell me quickly," she murmured; "I—I can't wait; you frighten me."

Felix studied her frank countenance and anxious blue orbs; he seemed reluctant to begin.

"Brian," he said at length; "our little Brian, Esther ——"

Esther Carew trembled. "Not—not dead?" she whispered. Felix Dering's reply was a hopeless movement.

"We cannot be sure," he confessed; "the child has disappeared; there is no trace to enlighten our darkness. All is blank ignorance."

He sat down abruptly on the bank of turf at the roadside and hid his face.

"I—I loved the boy," he muttered, "and people are saying a horrible thing."

Esther breathed heavily—his emotion appalled her.

"What can they be saying," she urged, "that need distress you so?"

A voice responded to her query—a voice which was not Felix's.

"They are saying," it answered; "that Mr. Felix Dering murdered his uncle, and has broken down the last barrier

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between himself and a snug fortune by doing away with his baby cousin."

Esther looked round in astonishment, and Felix, startled out of his despair, glanced up. Before them stood Inspector Brasher.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SHE SHALL BE YOURS, OTTO."

"IT is the same, Kraft, beyond a doubt; I remember his figure distinctly—short, athletic, and the left arm missing."

Otto Hare flung the end of his cigarette across the room on to the marble hearth. Joseph Kraft shrugged a couple of large shoulders and pursued a rather delicate task. Bent over the wooden stand which supported the cage of tropical birds, he was engaged in capturing a brown morsel of existence, red-beaked and black-eyed.

The Professor's soft fingers imprisoned it at length. Then, by means of a small pair of surgical nippers, he trimmed its unwieldy claws. The contrast between the elephantine German and the frail creature in his grasp was extravagant. Yet he manipulated it with a singular gentleness.

"Why should this fellow, whoever he is," continued the Golden Dwarf, "want to come prying about Wyresdale Park?"

Kraft smiled as he released his feathered patient.

"You must not forget, my dear friend," he said, "that you are a local mystery, and sailors are inquisitive folk."

He opened the cage and allowed the flock of birds to flutter round him. When he had poured a tiny mound of rape-seed upon his palm they hurried down to devour it. The German's hand was hidden by the restless bodies and half-expanded wings of his pets.

Otto Hare had risen from the leather-covered lounge which fronted the window of the Professor's apartment. An impetuous stride brought him close to Joseph Kraft.

"How did you know," queried the Golden Dwarf, staring at Kraft's bland features, "that he was a sailor?"

The German's pale blue orbs flashed behind their thick lenses, but the amused expression did not quit his countenance.

"By a certain roll in the rascal's gait," he answered smoothly, "which, to a habitual observer such as I am, denotes the sea-goer. Also, by a tattoo-mark on the fist that held the knife with which our lamented Cerberus was stabbed."

Otto Hare sneered.

"You perceived the last detail no little distance away," commented the Golden Dwarf, "though man and dog were on the ground, and yet, a few days back, you assured me that he had both his arms, while I myself could tell that he

"You are a bad diplomatist, Foley. I have a pistol in my sleeve, yet I did not flourish it under your nose. Pray, cease to fidget with your knife."

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had only one. Kraft, for some reason or other, you are hoodwinking me."

Joseph Kraft collected his favourites and prevailed upon them to re-enter their cage.

"We live too much alone, my poor Hare," he opined; "this morbid imaginativeness proves it. Since, however, you are interested by the assassin of your biggest—and worst—mongrel, I will learn what there is to be learned about him and report to you."

The German rinsed his finger-tips in a bowl of water that was surrounded by the scientific litter of his work-bench, took a straw hat off his desk, a key from his pocket, and turned to Otto Hare.

"I have the best temper possible," he announced casually, "but I am not a child or a fool, Otto. You permitted yourself, Otto, to suggest that I was hoodwinking you. In my excess of good-nature I almost omitted to say that I ought not to tolerate such liberties. I mention it now."

The Golden Dwarf spun on his heel, his diminutive frame quivering with resentment. Kraft moved towards the door of the bright, strange chamber. There he paused and scrutinised the proud visage of Otto Hare.

"Otto, my friend," he murmured, "do not neglect your new character of Romeo to call names at your stage-manager. You want Esther Carew for your Juliet. You should not offend the only person who can mould her to your will. She loves Felix Dering, and he is five feet eleven in his riding-boots. You are forty-seven inches and she dreads you."

Joseph Kraft doffed his spectacles, polished them, and chuckled. The Golden Dwarf muttered an oath. Kraft mounted the glasses again and beamed on him.

"But she shall be yours, Otto," cried the German; "I promise you—I, Joseph Kraft."

He put his key in the lock and waited for Otto Hare to pass out of the room. The Golden Dwarf did so, the lines of anger puckering his low brow and compressing his cruel mouth. Kraft secured the door and marched downstairs, his adieu a wave of his plump hand.

As he threaded the lush alleys of Wyresdale Park, to gain its ring-fence of brick and the iron wicket, he grumbled to himself.

"Otto is restless," he said under his breath; "these midgets they are all nerves. If I had left it in his power he would bite me. As it is he would but break his teeth. Yet I shall not let him try—he must be soothed and kept quiet, soothed and kept quiet."

Mumbling to himself, he reached the private exit, unfastened it, stepped through, and strolled along the high road. A few moments later he was rapping at the tarred portal of a cottage on the grassy margin of a narrow lane. In the brief period that elapsed before the summons provoked a response he had transferred something from his coat-tail to his starched cuff.

A cropped and bullet-shaped cranium thrust itself out suddenly. The visitor identified, its owner retreated.

"What cheer, Dutchy?" he exclaimed. "Warp your fat hull in—blowed if you haven't as much beam as a collier! You're overdue, Dutchy; I was to have had the dollars days ago."

He dropped the latch and followed the German within, pulling his clasp-knife free of his pocket and fixing on Kraft a glance of profound distrust.

The Professor sat down unconcernedly, dragged his chair to the table, and revealing a linen bag of the type used by bankers, drew the tape, and tilted the article bottom up. At this point he halted and desired the sailor to close the shutters. Nicholas Foley grinned but complied, lighting a candle, which, stuck by its base to the painted shelf, ornamented the chimney-piece. In the artificial dusk thus created Kraft counted out a rouleau of sovereigns.

"Twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six," he finished, and stacked the coins in a double pile. Foley gazed, but made no criticism, saved that he clutched the haft of the weapon which nestled in the unbuttoned pocket on his hip. Kraft rose and indicated the money.

"You are a bad diplomatist, Foley," he said, secreting the linen bag about him. "I have a pistol in my sleeve, yet I did not flourish it under your nose. Pray cease to fidget with your knife; you bored me by the trick when we had a previous consultation."

Crestfallen the sailor obeyed, and his redoubtable antagonist proceeded.

"This," explained Dr. Kraft, "is a first quarterly payment of twenty-six pounds—two sovereigns a week. That amount shall be yours so long as you devote your attention to—to your garden. The slightest symptom of curiosity on your part will lose you an income of a hundred a year. You comprehend?"

Nicholas nodded and gathered up the instalment of his annuity. Kraft motioned him aside, walked to the exit of the cottage, and stood thoughtful.

"Put the cash out of sight," he ordered, "and undo the shutters."

Sulkily and in silence Foley performed the command. Joseph Kraft lifted the latch and peered forth.

"By the bye," he said, lingering, "no more poaching at Wyresdale Park. You were poaching, you recollect, the morning on which you killed Mr. Hare's mastiff. You were simply in search of a rabbit to flavour your modest lunch; no other motive, eh, my friend?"

"I reckon that was about it," growled the sailor, extinguishing the candle.

"You are an apt pupil," declared the Professor, and slid a nickel-plated revolver from his sleeve to the breast of his frock-coat. The door creaked and he was gone.

Nicholas Foley stalked to the casement and for several seconds studied the retreating German. Then, without uttering a single syllable, he approached a corner cupboard, reached down a whiskey-bottle almost drained, shook the last of the fluid into his hallowed palm, and gulped it from that primitive bowl.

"Took me flat aback," he owned confidentially; "ran into wind'ard of me slick with his dashed popgun. What's the odds? I've got the specie. Nick, you're a made man and you'll splice the mainbrace at the Wheatsheaf arter sprinkling them sallids."

He clapped on his slouched felt, caught up a metal pot, rolled into his garden, and filled the utensil at a rain-butt under the eaves. As he sprayed the contents upon a plot of cress a cool inquiry sounded behind him.

"Evening," it said, "and how is the malaria?"

Nicholas Foley set his can down.

"Why," he ejaculated, "if it isn't the first mate from the physic-shop! Thankee, malary's not obstropolus for the moment."

The chemist's assistant leaned on the gate.

"I'm glad of that," he rejoined, and added: "Oh, I notice you've struck up an acquaintance with Professor Kraft—saw him come out. Tell me, why were you so startled when you met him in our place a week past?"

Nicholas hauled up a clay pipe and began to stuff into the bowl some of his choice red Virginian.

"Ask me anything else, messmate," he protested, "and I'll show my papers frank and fair. As to Dutchy and me, mum's the word."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Are You Mad, Miss Garland?"

"Why do you tell me this, Mr. Brasher; am I to be publicly accused of the crimes in question?"

Felix Dering had started up, and, with Esther clinging

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to his arm, put these stern queries to the passive Inspector. Brasher regarded the lovers for a moment. A glimmer of emotion crossed his sedate visage and he lowered his glance; Esther Carew's piteous gaze was more than he could sustain. He rubbed his hands together and shifted his service boots upon the dusty kerb.

"No," admitted Michael Brasher, "not yet; there isn't any evidence worth a name. But what is the use of pretending to ignore the rumour when Wyresdale discusses nought else. So, as I happened to catch a few words of your talk, sir, I thrust in, and hope Miss Carew and yourself will pardon the liberty."

The Inspector scrutinised, while he spoke, the expression of Felix Dering's countenance and the attitude of his stalwart figure. They did not seem to enlighten the astute police officer. He wrinkled a pair of prominent brows and changed his harsh manner for a less repellent air.

"It's hardly a nice position, sir," he continued, "from your point of view, is it? You might think, now, of taking some legal course to vindicate yourself, say a libel suit against one of the parties who may have helped to spread the allegations."

Felix grew pale; he knew that Inspector Brasher, firm, polite, deliberate, was feeling his mental pulse. Esther fathomed the Inspector's purpose, her fingers trembled convulsively on Felix's sleeve.

"I will not stoop," declared Felix Dering, "to notice or dispute such infamous suggestions. I would not have harmed a hair of my uncle's head or a curl of little Brian's. It is not my fault if the murder of Sir Christopher and the disappearance of his infant son redound to my advantage. After what has occurred, I would not permit myself to profit by either. Should it be possible, I will find the child Brian; whether or no, I will never accept a penny of the Dering fortune or an inch of the Dering lands."

Michael Brasher pulled at his stiff beard.

"Such a sacrifice would," he hinted, "be looked on as purely politic."

"By fools," burst forth Felix, "who can suppose that I should surrender that which I had committed crimes to obtain. You, Mr. Brasher, when you unearth a clue to associate me with the death of my uncle or the spiriting away of his child, will do your duty as if I were the meanest labourer in Wyresdale."

The Inspector saluted, bowed to Esther, and passed by. Once he slackened his speed and turned, as if puzzled. But his tall frame steadied itself, he shook his loose limbs, increased his stride, and faded from their sight.

Felix breathed heavily.

"Fate is cruel, my darling," he said. "There goes an honest fellow, and he, too, shares the suspicion that has fallen on me like a curse."

Esther pondered the difficulty, the glow of a woman's splendid confidence in her blue orbs.

"Why will not people understand you?" she asked. "I know you could not even dream of doing the terrible things they charge you with."

A sad smile flickered over Felix Dering's features.

"You love me, darling," he said, "and yet—you might be mistaken in me. Hundreds of tender hearts such as yours have trusted as you trust, and have been deceived. Alas, guilt and innocence are matters of proof. If I had only not come back that night! The realisation of what it may involve chills me like the shadow of the scaffold."

Esther hid her face and a sob broke from her.

"It was my fault," she wept. "But for me you and Sir Christopher would not have quarrelled, or, if you had done, you would have stayed in Duchester, where you are believed to have been."

Felix sighed.

"Do not reproach yourself, dearest," he answered. "It was inevitable that Brian's disappearance, with which you have nothing to do, should cast a slur on me, who am next in the succession, and was, for the moment, his male guardian. I must begin my vindication by tracing him, a task that might appal the united forces of Scotland Yard. The search may carry me far afield, and we shall not be able to snatch those delicious interviews. The egregious Mr. Hare will lay uninterrupted siege to your affections."

Esther coloured.

"You—you are not jealous?" she stammered.

"If jealousy necessitates distrust, no," said her lover, "but if it signifies envy, yes. He will feast his odious eyes on your sweet countenance, as I shall pine to do; he will whisper into your pink ears those romantic vows that I would fain be privileged to utter. I could not doubt you, my own, but I could wring, with a vast amount of comfort, the millionaire neck of the Golden Dwarf."

"He will do neither of the things you fear," objected Esther, "for my prettiness will be spoiled by crying, and he could not talk as you talk if he had ten millions instead of two. And now I must go, my poor Felix; I slipped out for a scamper, and couldn't resist the chance of peeping at the gates of Dering House since I am not allowed to pay it a visit. I shall run home across the meadows and steal in at the kitchen door. Don't bother to see me back."

She sought to render her tone coquettish, but the tears choked it. Felix drew the grief-stricken girl into the shelter of the hawthorn hedge and kissed her. A moment later she was flying athwart the pastures that lay between her and the Rosery.

Felix re-entered the avenue and threaded it towards the quaint gables and ivied turrets of Dering House. A hot August noon brooded over the park but a faint breeze stirred the great boughs around him and ruffled the grass to right and left.

A species of contemptuous pride froze Felix Dering into an unnatural calm. For a week blow after blow had descended on him; the advent of an extraordinary rival to his love, the rumour of his probable connection with the fate of Sir Christopher, the insinuation that he had removed the child Brian to clear his own path to rank and prosperity—the accumulation had been too much. He could endure, he could not rebel.

At the end of the sunlit terrace he paused and threw himself down, the velvet turf which formed the slope supporting him—a perfect couch. The dizziness of his brain forbade meditation, he trifled with a string of creeper that hung from an antique stone vase.

While he lounged there, a very wretched and bewildered young Englishman, a rustle of skirts surprised him, and he leapt to his feet. Judith Garland had glided past the principal gable of Dering House, her filmy mourning-gown sweeping at her French heels, the white interior of her parasol fanning her piquant face, smart toque, and dark tresses. A damask rosebud at her throat lent a note of warmth to her sombre but graceful costume.

"Ah, Mr. Dering," she said, "this is unexpected. I fancied you absorbed by the search for our lost treasure, and I find you tired already."

Felix groaned.

"I cannot bring myself," he told her, "to challenge any further the sneers which greet my inquiries. Since seven o'clock this morning, when the nurse discovered Brian's cot to be empty, I have covered thirty miles and wearied two horses. I have telegraphed east, west, north, and south, visited the local stations on both systems, and, finally, arranged for a set of drags and a punt to be expressed from Derby. The Black Pool will be searched as soon as they arrive."

Judith Garland stepped to the plaster seat on the upper

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level of the terrace, her dark cheeks a fraction less brunette, her bosom heaving.

"I can bear no more," pursued Felix; "the ghastly scandal which associates with my uncle's murder flourishes everywhere. I am gaped at as though I were in the dock, and Brian's disappearance is attributed to my machinations. Oh, it is horrible, horrible!"

His companion laughed shrilly.

"Well acted!" she cried. "I am almost inclined to demand an encore."

Felix Dering contemplated her in amazement.

"Are you mad, Miss Garland?" he ejaculated.

The occupant of the stone bench leaned on a sculptured extremity.

"Do not try to cheat me also," she adjured him. "Remember I have the blood-stained links."

The other shuddered. There returned to him the memory of an evening, in the old mansion behind them, whereon he had seen, in Judith Garland's small palm, the fatal portion of chain which might be made to demonstrate his presence at Wyresdale the night of Sir Christopher's murder.

"You should have allowed me to explain," he said nervously, "how I parted with those links of my watch-guard. I should have done so but you have evaded me for the last few days, yet you assured me quite recently that you were my friend."

Judith Garland experienced a throb of triumph. His words gave her the opening for which she had awaited.

"Mr. Dering," she replied, "I have showed myself to be far from an enemy. Had I wished you evil I had but to deliver these links to the police."

"True," assented Felix perplexed; "though you would have been wrong, Miss Garland, for I am not guilty, in spite of them. I caught my chain vaulting the stile near the cross-roads, and, at the same time, tore my hand. Before actually dropping the shattered links I must have touched and marked them with my own blood."

Judith affected to consider this scrap of narrative.

"The chain was whole when you parted from Dering House for Duchester after Sir Christopher and you had quarrelled," she informed him. "The following morning it was broken; I observed it as you sat on your horse during our conversation at the cross-roads. If I am to be satisfied of your innocence I must learn at what hour the accident occurred."

Felix hesitated. Judith Garland had never won his confidence; but he was anxious to rid her mind of its frightful persuasion.

"I—I did return to Wyresdale from Duchester that night," he confessed, taking a share of the stone bench. "I was foolishly restless, and—and wanted to be near somebody whom I might not see often in the future. Mounting the stile I spoke of I broke my chain as I have described."

A peculiar gleam sprang to Judith's dark pupils. Her mouth twitched. She bent over to him, extending, it might have been involuntarily, her slender arms.

"Felix," she murmured, "how I have misjudged you! I also was miserable that evening; Sir Christopher had told us you were determined to leave Wyresdale. But I did not dream you—you cared—at least for me! So I have nursed the idea of avenging myself on you. Can you ever forgive me? It was because I loved you and was desperate."

She slid along the bench, her wild passion for him breaking through her mock misunderstanding of his reference to Esther. Judith Garland was beautiful, beautiful with a sullen beauty curiously Oriental. Her eyes shone, her scarlet lips pouted, her stooping form had about it something lithe and sinuous.

Felix Dering felt as if he were being tempted by the fabled creature which was half-woman, half-reptile. Her phrase "revenging myself on you" echoed in his ear. Judith seemed to be offering him a choice between death and disloyalty, death on the gallows or disloyalty to Esther.

A fortunate occurrence saved him the task of a hasty decision. A footman had come out on to the terrace.

"If you please, miss," he said, saluting, a stolid automaton, "there's a queer person wishes to speak to you in the hall. He says his name is Foley, but you won't know him—a common sort of fellow, miss, and mentioning a Mr. Neal."

Judith sprang up instantly.

"I will see him at once," she replied, and hurried after the servant. Pausing, she plucked the rosebud from her throat, kissed it, and flung it covertly backwards. It fell on the bench in front of Felix.

Stepping across the threshold of Dering House, Judith Garland encountered a short, stout mortal with a closely-cropped cranium. At sight of her he jerked his forelock, and his bearing became less impudently familiar. He slouched into one of the bay windows and lowered his voice.

"How goes it, my lass," he queried. "Will Dering plank down the ready?"

Judith gasped; the sailor's confident demeanour was plainly not assumed. He had greeted her as an intimate and an ally, and she did not dare to repel him.

"I reckon Neal logged me all right, eh?" went on Nicholas. "I arranged with him to stand in. Savvy? You had a plan to bring Dering into the shiners, and I calculate this missing kid's the idea. You are a clipper, my lass—a clipper!"

Judith Garland had strong nerves, but they quailed before the problem presented by this self-declared conspirator. She evaded the difficulty.

"No, no news yet," she stammered. "Thank you for calling."

Nicholas twisted his hat, embarrassed.

"Well," he added, "I only boarded you to report myself, that's all. I guess your brother told you my moorings—first cottage past the gate, steering for the cross-roads. So long, miss; I'll hail you again one of these days."

He pulled a fragment of his greasy thatch, shuffled through the hall, and let himself out. Judith put her hand to her heart; it was beating violently.

CHAPTER XV.

"Alive, the Child May Still Baulk Us."

"Your name's Jack, you little fool, and if you don't want to be beaten you will not forget it."

The maker of the announcement put her hands on her hips and frowned. She was an immensely stout person, with reddish hair, flattened to her skull in greased bandeaux. Her plump fingers bore a load of vulgar rings, massive pendants decorated her ears, and a giant brooch fastened a soiled lace fichu to the bosom of her dingy purple gown.

"I am not Jack," came the nervous answer, "but Brian Dering—Sir Brian Dering now my father is killed."

A blow on the side of the delicate head sent the child staggering across the room.

"Take that, you obstinate limb!" said his corrector irritably. "The next time I hear those words from your mouth I'll strip and flog you till the blood runs."

The baby baronet shrank before the virago into a corner of the apartment. It was a large chamber on an upper floor, crowded with out-of-date furniture, begrimed and unclean. A tortoiseshell kitten dozed on the skin hearth-rug, and the yellow London sunshine lent a broad shaft of light for the motes of the place to dance in.

A knock at the door checked further dispute between

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Brian and his singular teacher, and a maid, wearing broken boots and a limp print dress, carried through a tray. This supported a plate of watercress, cut bread-and-butter, a brown pot, and a cup and saucer.

"Tea, ma'am," she gasped, "and please, Mrs. Schwartz, will you step down and see a party as has been looking at the front parlour. I showed it according to orders, ma'am, but could anything be took off the rent for a permanency?"

The lodging-house keeper smoothed out her garments and sailed out as the servant relinquished the tray and stole

The baby baronet shrank before the virago into a corner of the apartment.

towards Brian. He had picked up the cat, which, nestled in his arms, purred its contentment.

"Bless your heart," murmured the girl. "I've been longing for a glimpse of you since they smuggled you up the other night. Do you like goodies? I've fetched you a pennorth. I nipped off and bought 'em an hour ago."

She showed a paper bag of mixed sweets. The child accepted them eagerly.

"What are you called," he asked, "Eliza or Jane? Our maids were Eliza and Jane."

The servant patted his curls.

"I am Louisa," she replied; "Lou for short. Who are you?"

Brian shook his fair locks.

"I am to be Jack," he said; "I must not tell you my real name. If I do she will whip me till I bleed."

"The brute!" cried Louisa, biting her lip. "Never mind, Jack, I'll bring you some chocolate-creams to-morrow. But don't speak of them or of these to her."

The child promised, and, Mrs. Schwartz's masculine tread sounding on the stair, Louisa hastened to the table and laid it for her mistress's repast.

The lodging-house keeper was in a bad temper, the effect of her experience below.

"Shabby respectability," she muttered, as she gained her padded lounge-chair. "I should be glad to learn, Louisa, what use shabby respectability is to me. I know the sort — a grumbling, fretful, cheese-paring lot. Get me the spirits out of the cellaret. I'm all of a flutter from annoyance."

Mrs. Schwartz delivered a key to her domestic, and Louisa produced a square, high-shouldered flask. Filling her cup with tea, sugar, and milk, the landlady added a quantum of gin and sipped it thirstily.

"Give the child a piece of bread-and-butter," she desired, "and don't drag me down again to no purpose."

"Yes'm," said the maid, secured Brian the biggest slice on the plate, restored the key of the cellaret, and slipped out sighing.

Mrs. Schwartz absorbed her meal with gusty pants betwixt each bite of food and drink of spirituous tea.

Wearied by his enforced quietude, the little baronet slumbered at length, the cat on his lap, Louisa's goodies clasped in his moist palm. Ultimately the eyes of the lodging house keeper noted the tiny parcel. She reached over, plucked it out of the hand that held it, and sniffed.

"Louisa!" she grumbled. "Sentimental idiot!"

As a commentary on the phrase, she bent a powerful elbow, flung the bag from the open sash, and proceeded to blend herself another strongly-flavoured jorum.

Her enjoyment of this was suspended by a quick step on the creaking flight close to, and she turned to regard the lean form and threadbare costume of Neal Garland.

Mrs. Schwartz waved him a jovial greeting, and pointed at a seat by the table.

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"You don't care for gin, Neal, my man," she remarked, "but you'll find the sherry in the usual quarter. Here's the magic wand."

Neal made use of the implement thus humourously described, unfastened the compartment in the mahogany chiffonnier, and lifted out the wine.

"Kid's asleep," he said, brimming his glass. "Cause much trouble?"

The other grinned—a wide, yet repulsive grin.

"Howled a while," she responded, "but I soon shut him up. Taught him to christen himself Jack in two twos."

Neal munched a leaf of cress.

"Your methods are so convincing!" he yawned.

Mrs. Schwartz wiped her double chin and loose throat.

"What are you going to do with the brat?" she queried.

"Dashed if I'm sure," conceded Neal; "I'm waiting for an inspiration. The lad's safe enough under your hospitable roof until he has forgotten those three syllables—'Brian Dering.' He'll eat less than a bird, and when the game is played out there'll be money in it for both of us."

"Perhaps," said the landlady; "but I don't see all the cards. It may be cautious, but I do love to know where the ace of spades is."

"The ace of spades," pursued Neal, "being the Law. My dear creature, you are beyond its clutch; you understand nothing, and they can't prove you do."

"I don't deny I'm all right—as far as I can calculate," admitted Mrs. Schwartz; "but I want to be told how you propose ridding yourself of him. A kid is a nuisance, and that's the truth."

"Cure him of his fondness for his name," said Neal Garland, "and I'll have him adopted or shipped to a foreign port, or——"

He stopped, reflectively. His reverie was shattered by the entrance of Louisa.

"Please'm," she began, "would Mr. Garland wish to be out or in? There is a young woman downstairs as must speak with him if he's at home. I was to say 'from W.'"

Neal read his hostess's glance.

"Let her come up," he murmured, "and spare us a minute, like a kind soul. Judith won't comprehend your value at first."

Mrs. Schwartz grunted, but dragged her huge body up and tottered from the room, motioning to Louisa, who followed on her heels. A few seconds later Judith Garland hurried into the apartment.

She was thickly veiled and disguised by the same dark and ample cloak which she had worn on the night of Brian's abduction. After a rapid scrutiny of the chamber she pushed up the net that hid her features. Their expression was scornful, her bearing impatient.

"You are the last visitor I dreamed of," faltered Neal. A sudden alarm had seized upon him, his sister's gaze was so ruthless.

Judith, unheeding this observation, approached him deliberately, and with great precision uttered the one word "Foley."

Neal's jaw dropped.

"The deuce!" he said. "I omitted to explain about him. The rogue spied on us at that *tête-à-tête* near the Cross, when we discovered those links of Dering's chain. He picked me up in the lane by his cottage subsequently and demanded an arrangement. He had heard too much and I yielded. Of course I should have mentioned the matter to you, but it escaped my mind in the rush."

Judith sneered.

"You are a clumsy conspirator," she chafed; "you might have spoiled everything. I could not guess if this Foley were spy or colleague. He came to me, asked news of my plan, and spoke as one who appreciated all. Baffled, I obtained leave of absence and journeyed to consult you."

"Your plan!" repeated Neal. "I gave him no particulars. Did you?"

"He needed none," said Judith. "He told me he supposed the 'missing kid'—his elegant phrase—was my idea, and congratulated me as a 'clipper.' Is he knave or clown?"

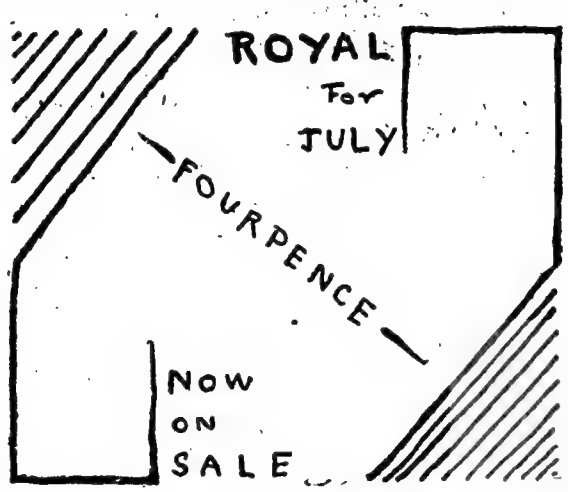
"I would rather not risk an opinion," answered her brother. "Destiny has thrust him into our plot and we must do the best we can. Is the hunt up after the child?"

"Hot and hard," declared Judith. "I am not positive I myself was not tracked here. Have you disposed of Brian?"

Neal indicated the hearth-rug where the little baronet slept, the little kitten beside him. Judith Garland pondered the unconscious figure.

"Neal," she murmured, "the boy shall not be traced. It would ruin our grasp upon Felix Dering. What do you recommend?" She lowered her voice so that it reached him in an almost inaudible whisper. "Alive," she said, "the child might always baulk us."

(To be continued.)



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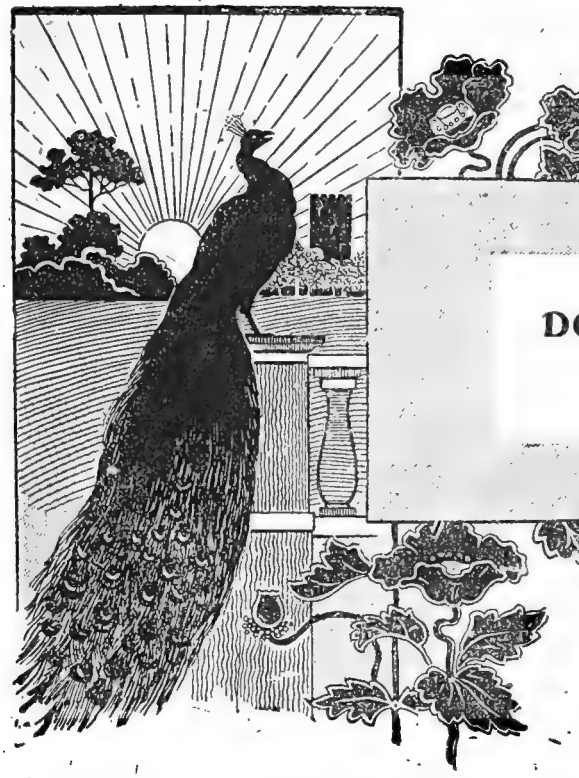

DOUBLY BEATEN.

By John Henry Peat.

THE autumn tints were fast giving place to the bareness of winter, and the balmy breezes were being succeeded by the biting winds.

The swallows were departing to warmer climes, and following their example, Harold Battersby was also making preparations for seeking fresh fields, or rather, renewing his acquaintance with old ones.

He had originally come to Watersbury to stay three months, but the three months had drifted on into almost a year, varied with brief visits to town, and the reason of this extension was, of course, a woman.

The dissipations of several seasons—late hours, wines, and other things which go to make up an idle and wealthy young man's programme—had resulted in a serious breakdown in health, and he had come to Watersbury to recuperate. A lonely stroll and an adventure had brought about his introduction to Alice Wharton. She was a farmer's daughter, and it was in crossing her father's meadows that he had met with his adventure. He had lost his way, and on inquiring from a rustic whom he met, he had been told that the nearest way back to Watersbury was by the footpath that led through Farmer Wharton's meadows.

The rustic had omitted to inform him, however, that in these same meadows was a bull endowed with dangerous inclinations, and this omission had led to a sharp race between Harold Battersby and the aforesaid bull. The biped, however, just managed to beat the quadruped by a short head, and landed, breathless and panting, on the safe side of a stone wall. The attention of the farmer had been drawn to the race and he had just landed at the wall, accompanied by his dog as Harold Battersby vaulted over and saved his person from the bull's unwelcome attentions.

While the angry bull bellowed on one side of the wall, the farmer apologised on the other, and eventually the two men walked off to the farm together, the farmer, with true countryman's hospitality having invited the visitor to rest and refresh himself before continuing his journey.

This was how Harold Battersby and Alice Wharton became acquainted. Alice Wharton was plump and rosy as became a farmer's daughter. She was also good-looking and intelligent, and Battersby, to whom country life was insufferably dull, decided that a flirtation with the farmer's daughter would be at least something in the way of diversion. Nothing was more natural, then, than he should stroll out to the farm next morning, ostensibly to thank the farmer for his hospitality, but really to improve his acquaintance with the farmer's daughter. Hence he was not at all displeased to find that John Wharton was away at a distant market, and that his thanks had to be received by Alice, who was her father's housekeeper.

Harold Battersby was a man of the world well versed in all its wiles and sophistries, while Alice Wharton was well versed only in the arts of the world in which she lived. Thus did the unequal contest begin. Like her sex Alice Wharton was not averse to receiving admiration, nor proof against flattery, and she soon began to look forward to the visits of the handsome visitor. The peeps she got into the gay world, through the descriptions given by Harold Battersby set her longing to partake of its gaieties, and the rest was easy. The woman unsophisticated, the man specious and unscrupulous, it was the old, old story of woman's trust in a man's honour, with the usual result. This brings us up to the time of the afore-mentioned preparations for departure. The trusting woman and the man she had trusted, stood together in the lane which ran at the back of the farm.

"Well, Alice, I must be going," Harold Battersby was saying, "I have my packing to do, yet."

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

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"I wish I could go with you," she replied tearfully.

"Don't I tell you it's impossible?" he answered irritably. "You must wait here until I send for you. As soon as I can arrange matters I will let you know."

"But you won't be long, because——"

"Yes, I know. I don't want it dinning in my ears everlastingly."

"Harold, you don't know how much I fear."

"There you go again. Why the dickens do you keep on worrying me? Hang it all, you women think only of yourselves. It never occurs to you that I am making sacrifices. I might have done better than marry a farmer's daughter."

This brutal speech only brought a flood of tears, and Harold Battersby saw that if he were to get away at all comfortably he must adopt a different tone. Putting his arm round the sobbing girl, he drew her to him, and in the tenderest tones he had hitherto been accustomed to use, he tried to soothe her.

"Come, Alice, don't be silly. Surely you can trust me. Once more I tell you that as soon as I can get matters arranged you shall join me in London. Now dry your eyes or you will have your father wanting to know the reason of their redness."

With a great effort Alice Wharton checked her tears. Her meetings with Harold Battersby had been mostly clandestine. In the early days of their acquaintance John Wharton had warned his daughter.

"Alice, lass, don't thee have too much to say to that London young feller. He may be reight enough, but lasses is apt to get fond o' good lookin' young men, and tha knows theer can niver be nowt between him and thee. He belongs to a different set to us. Even if he wanted to wed ma' lass, which isna likely, aw shouldn't consent, becos tha couldn't make thisen comfortable among his set."

Thus had the farmer spoken, but even then it was too late. The girl's eyes had been already dazzled, for Harold Battersby was not the man, once having decided upon his course, to let the grass grow under his feet. The only result of this warning was that thence forward their meetings were arranged secretly.

The interview shortly afterwards terminated and Alice Wharton stole home to begin her period of weary waiting. Though she had been troubled, she doubted not that Harold Battersby would keep his promise. True, in the course of her reading, which consisted chiefly of novelettes and the weekly paper which circulated in their district, Alice Wharton had become acquainted with characters such as Harold Battersby. She had read of men who had betrayed the trust of innocent girls, but in her lover she did not recognise one of these. Like many another she fondly dreamed that he was good and honourable. Though others were base, not he. Yet she was troubled, and would be until she received the summons to join him, and then all would be well.

In the meantime Harold Battersby departed. He had promised to write on his arrival in town. Two days after his departure, Alice Wharton received her letter, and as her father was away in the fields she sat down to enjoy her first love letter. Eagerly she tore it open, and then came disillusion.

"Dear Alice," it ran, "as I did not want a scene when I left you I deferred saying what I must now tell you. It is, of course, quite impossible for me to marry you. Such a course would not only ruin my prospects, but it would make you forever miserable, as you could not adapt yourself to the usages of society. It is better that things should end now. I enclose you bank notes for £20, and trust you will take a sensible view of the case. —Yours sincerely,

"Harold Battersby."

Alice Wharton did not faint. She did not cry. She simply sat and read and re-read those heartless lines. This man, then, was just like those others, she had read of. She had thought that such as he only existed in the novelettes she read, that they were the creations of the story writer's brains. Now she knew that they did exist, that Harold Battersby was a cowardly villain. As she realised what a mean, contemptible creature she had set up on a pedestal and worshipped, her love turned to hate.

She never wanted to see Harold Battersby's face again. Not under any conditions would she marry him now. She wanted a man—a true man—and he was not such.

Having decided what she would *not* do, the next thing was to settle what she *would* do.

To begin with she must leave home. She had let her father's warning go unregarded, and now she could not face his anger. She remembered that in the afternoon he would be going over to the market town to attend a farmers' dinner, and that he would be very late home. He would not expect her to wait up for him. On these occasions he always took the backdoor key with him and let himself in. Therefore, she would not be missed until the following morning. Anxiously she waited his return from the fields for then he would not be long ere he departed.

When John Wharton returned Alice was upstairs. Dearly though she would have liked to have kissed him before she stole away she dare not. The probability of her breaking down would be great, hence she must forego this last kiss.

As she sat she heard his voice in the yard. She heard him ordering one of the men to put the horse in. She heard him come up to his room to dress. She stole a glance at him as he descended the stairs when this operation was concluded. Finally, she heard him calling her.

"Alice, Alice," he called, "where art ta lass?"

It required all her efforts to answer without betraying her emotion, but she managed it.

"I am busy, father," she answered from her bedroom door.

"All right, lass. Aw'm off to 't dinner, an' aw shan't be hoam till latish. Tha needn't wait for me."

"Good-bye, father!" she called back.

"She might think aw wor gooin' a long journey wi' her 'good-bye.' muttered the farmer. "What's tha meean bi 'good-bye,' lass? Good mornin'."

"Well, then, good-morning," replied Alice, and to her relief he moved off with this. Had it been necessary to say more she would have given way, for she knew it was "Good-bye," and not simply "Good-morning" she was saying.

As she watched him drive out of the yard the tears welled up, but she dashed them away. They hindered her sight, and she must gaze upon that retreating figure as long as possible, for was it not the last time she would see him? Hungrily she looked until a bend in the road hid him from her view.

"Good-bye—good-bye and God bless you," she mur-

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

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mured as he vanished, and then flinging herself on her bed she abandoned herself to her grief. Not for herself was she weeping, but for the father whose home would be desolate on his return.

For a while she wept on, and then she commenced her preparations for flight. She had a little money—a very little—for she would not take anything but her own. She had the housekeeping money, but that was her father's. She had the twenty pounds, but that she would not touch. Dressing herself in her most serviceable clothing and hiding away in her pockets her few trinkets, she prepared for the next ordeal. When all her preparations were concluded—all, God knows they were few—she slowly descended the stairs.

The maid who assisted her in the household work, and who slept at her own home at night, was busy with her duties.

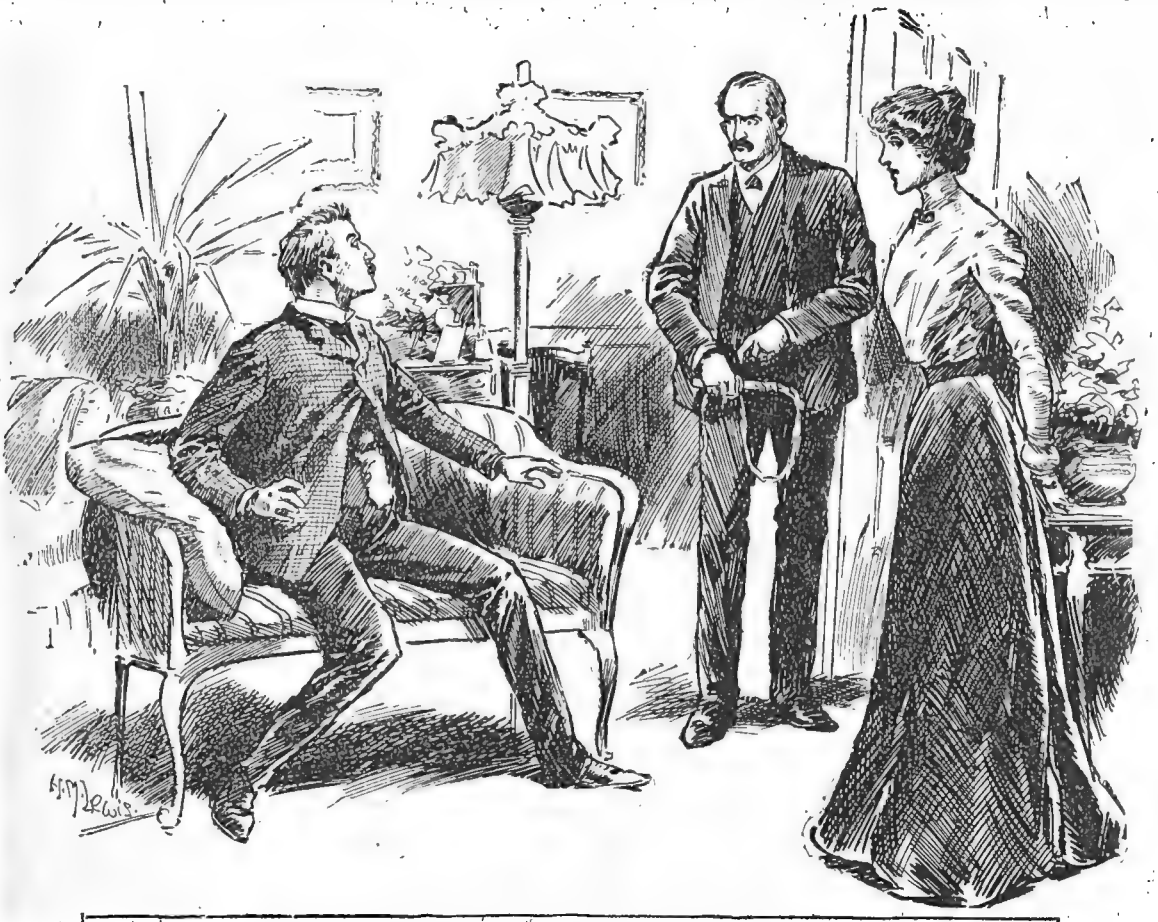
"Sarah," said Alice, "I am going out for the afternoon. You can tell the men to look up to-night and not wait for me, as I shall come home with father."

"All right, miss," replied Sarah, and went on with her work.

There was only one more thing to do. Upstairs again she went to do it, taking with her writing materials.

"Father," she wrote, "it was good-bye and not only good morning. You warned me and I took no heed, so now I must bear my punishment. I am not going to him. I never want to see him again, and I shall never see you again. Once more, good-bye. Don't try to find me. Let me go my own way. Your sorrowing Alice."

This she placed on her father's pillow, and then she stole out of the house, taking only a small parcel, and went forth to she knew not what. Straight to the station she went, and booked to a place only a dozen miles away. From there she continued her journey on foot, avoiding houses and people as much as possible. She was a good walker, and before night closed in she had covered a considerable distance, and was in a district where she was not known. On, on she went until she came to another railway line which crossed the country at right angles to the one on which she had first travelled. When she arrived at a station she went in



To Harold Battersby's surprise and dismay, there stood John Hardcastle.

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and scanned the table of fares until she saw the name of Birmingham. Nobody in their district that she had heard of ever went to Birmingham, and she decided that she would be safe there. Accordingly she paid her fare, and late that night—the clocks were striking twelve—she arrived in the metropolis of the Midlands, hungry and weary. She wandered out of the great station into the still busy streets, for busy they were to her, not knowing where to go. As she looked helplessly around, a middle-aged woman accosted her.

"Are you looking for someone?" asked the woman.

"No," replied Alice nervously.

"Surely a bonny-looking lass like yourself is not alone?"

"Yes, I am. Can you tell me where I can stay to-night?"

The woman looked at Alice and hesitated before replying. Her scrutiny seemed to satisfy her, and so she went on.

"Well, my lass, I don't know who you are, but it's not a fit time of night for a girl to be wandering about alone. Come along with me, and I will find you a bed. Have you any friends here, or anybody you know?"

Alice sadly shook her head.

"Whatever brings you, a young girl, to Birmingham, without friends? I am glad I met you, for goodness knows what might have become of you. Now, come on home and have some supper."

Alice followed her guide. Leaving the busy thoroughfares, they turned up a side street, and then through several alleys into another street, badly paved and dimly lighted. Into one of the houses in this street her guide led her, saying apologetically. "It's not a very handsome place, my dear, but it's a good deal better than wandering about the streets alone, and, besides—I don't want to hurt your feelings—but you would not easily find a place where they would take a young woman travelling alone."

Alice's heart went out in thankfulness to her friend.

Very quickly a substantial supper was prepared—of which, however, the girl could only partake sparingly. When she had finished she drew out her purse, but the woman stopped her.

"Never mind about that now, dear. Just you come upstairs, and then in the morning we can talk about that."

Grateful for the woman's thoughtfulness, and anxious to escape any further questioning, Alice went up to her bedroom, and soon, from utter weariness, she was fast asleep.

She awoke early next morning, but her hostess had arisen still earlier and when she got downstairs she found breakfast was on the table. To her great relief the woman asked no questions during the meal. At the conclusion Alice again asked the amount of her indebtedness.

"Let me see—supper, bed and breakfast—that will be five shillings," replied the woman. "I am only a poor woman or I would not charge you that."

Alice once more produced her purse, but on opening it she gave a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter my dear?"

"I've—I've lost my money,"

"Lost your money. What do you mean?"

"I had over twenty-two pounds last night and now I've only this," and Alice took out a two shilling piece.

"Where did you lose it, do you think?"

"I don't know. I had it when you spoke to me a the station."

"What do you mean?" and the mask fell off. "Do you mean to insinuate I stole it. Give me the two shillings and get out. Aren't you ashamed to impose on a poor woman and then insinuate you've been robbed in my house. If you're not off at once, I'll call a policeman."

Terrified beyond measure Alice put on her hat and went out of the house. That the woman had robbed her she was sure, but she was helpless. Not knowing where she was going she hurried on, anxious to get away from the city. No more acquaintance did she want with city people.

All that day she wandered on, not daring to stop anywhere. At the sight of a constable she trembled. Darkness came on and still she pursued her course. She was now out in the open country, where the pedestrians were few and far between.

At last wearied out she sank down by the wayside and soon fell asleep. Ere she had slept long the slumber gave way to delirium.

The events of the last few days had been too much for her and she babbled on, until her mutterings attracted the attention of a passing member of the county constabulary.

"Hello! what's this?" exclaimed P.C. Jenkins, as he turned his bull's-eye on the unconscious woman. For the moment he was puzzled. She was not one of the tramp order, that was certain; neither was it a "drunk."

"Here, miss," he exclaimed, "you mustn't stop here."

"Good-bye, father—not good morning," murmured the unconscious girl.

Police-constable Jenkins scratched his head. What was to be done?

Then an idea struck him. John Hardcastle, whose house was close by, was reputed to be a good-hearted man. He would call him up, and procure a conveyance for the girl to be removed in. Acting on this, he proceeded to the house. In response to his ring at the bell, the head of the worthy householder appeared at the window, and after hearing the officer's statement, he was soon downstairs. Having looked at the girl, John Hardcastle quickly made up his mind.

"Give me a hand, officer—let us get her indoors."

"Wouldn't it be better to take her to the hospital, sir?"

"Hospital?—no! Bring her in, and we'll see what we can do for her here."

John Hardcastle was a bachelor, and his household was presided over by his sister, a lady as good-hearted as her brother. This lady had been aroused, and was waiting to second—or, rather, to take the lead in—the work of restoring the lonely wanderer.

For weeks Alice Wharton lay at the Grange, a victim to brain fever, which left her weak and helpless. During those days Mary Hardcastle learned to love the girl thus strangely thrown upon her hands. During the stage of convalescence the patient was not worried by questions, but when she grew strong again Mary Hardcastle tried to learn the story.

When she did eventually hear it, she felt nothing but sympathy which was shared by her brother.

Her father was communicated with, but his grief and anger at her treatment of him was equally great, and he refused to have anything more to do with her.

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

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John Hardcastle anathematised the stern father when this decision reached him.

"Well Mary, what's to be done?" he asked as he discussed the matter with his sister.

"John, she must stay with us. She is not fit to go out into the world alone."

"That's right, sister. I knew you would say so."

Alice at first demurred when this was proposed, but her objections were quickly overruled, and she became one of the family, despite the comments of the gossips of the district, whose knowledge was, however, very limited.

Several years rolled by, and there appeared on the scene one who desired Mary Hardcastle to come and preside over his home. When this happened, John Hardcastle took an early opportunity of having a long chat with his *protegée*.

"Alice," he said, "you know Mary is going to leave us?"

"Yes!" replied Alice with downcast eyes, for she had thought much on this subject.

"Well, look here, Alice, I am a plain fellow. I can't make long love speeches, but I want you to take Mary's place. I want you to become my wife."

Alice blushed and hesitated. She loved her benefactor, but she had never dared to hope to be loved by him. John Hardcastle guessed of what she was thinking. He took her hand in his.

"Alice, I love you. Never mind what has happened in the past. If you can love me, that is all I want. Say, lass, do you love me?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Well, then, that settles it."

"But can you really love me, knowing what you do?"

"Yes, I can, and do, that's more."

The upshot of all this was that there was a double wedding at the Grange, and Alice Wharton became Mrs. Hardcastle.

For six months after the wedding Alice Hardcastle's life was one of happiness, the only cloud being the persistent refusal of her father to communicate with her. John had been over to Watersbury to try and effect a reconciliation, but his mission had failed.

During this intervening period what had been happening to Harold Battersby? After the despatch of that insulting letter, he had lived in doubt. True, he had given no address in his letter, but he was for some time haunted with a fear that the girl he had wronged might some day cross his path, even in London.

But as time wore on, and he heard nothing he almost forgot the incident. He went back and lived the old life, drinking, gambling, and the like, until at last he came to the end of his resources, and at the time Alice Wharton became the wife of John Hardcastle he was reduced to living on his friends, until they one after the other dropped him disgust.

It was just about six months after the date of Alice's wedding that an old chum offered him a berth in his office in Birmingham, and Harold Battersby accepted. He had only been there a few days, when Fate brought him face to face with the former object of his attentions. He was stepping out of a public-house when she passed the door.

"Alice Wharton!" he exclaimed.

On hearing her maiden name, Alice turned and gazed in astonishment at the speaker. At first, so much had he altered she did not recognise him.

Then she knew him, and the colour receded from her cheeks.

"You! Harold Battersby," she ejaculated.

"Yes! You don't seem pleased to see me, Alice."

"Is that surprising?"

"Well, no, I suppose not. But let bygones be bygones. Can't you forget and forgive?"

"I can do neither one nor the other, and I must ask you if you meet me again not to speak. Remember we are strangers now."

"Allright, my fine lady," muttered the scamp, "things seem to have gone better with you than they have with me. What the good people would call retributive justice, I suppose. Nevertheless I am not going to lose sight of you."

Mrs. Hardcastle had moved away and did not hear this speech. Shortly after leaving Battersby she was joined by her husband. John was quick to note the pallor of his wife and remarked thereon.

"Aren't you very well, dear? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I am not very well, John. I should like to get home as soon as possible."

"Very well. I have nothing more to do in the city, so we will go at once."

Accordingly they proceeded direct to the station. Harold Battersby had followed and just as the train was moving out he sprang into one of the rear compartments, bent on knowing more, and if possible, profiting by this chance meeting. John Hardcastle and his wife were the only passengers to leave the train at their station. It would never do for him to get out there so he went on to the next stopping place only a short distance away but as the train pulled out he heard one of the porters address the gentleman by name. This was something to work upon. He returned by the next train. As he alighted he saw the porter who had spoken to Mr. Hardcastle. To him he addressed himself.

"Can you direct me to Mr. Hardcastle's house," asked Battersby. Having received the directions he put another question, which brought him just the information he wanted.

"Can you tell whether Mr. Hardcastle is likely to be at home?"

"Sure to be, sir. He and his wife came down from the city by the last train almost half an hour ago."

"Thank you," replied Battersby, and he meant it.

Then Alice Wharton was married. This was good news to him. The appearance of her husband betokened affluence. It never occurred to Battersby that John Hardcastle was acquainted with her story. Such an idea never crossed his thoughts. What did occur to him was that here lay a chance of getting money easily. Mrs. Hardcastle, he doubted not would readily purchase his silence. He turned into the village inn until night came. Then he commenced operations. He wrote a note which he entrusted to a lad with instructions to deliver it to Mrs. Hardcastle. The note was brief and to the point.

"Dear Mrs. Hardcastle," he said, "I am happy to hear that you are married and have money. I have very little money, but I have a secret which might be of interest to your husband. My silence should be worth something to you, and I shall be glad to arrange terms. A line here will find me to-morrow evening.—Harold."

This missive was duly delivered. Mrs. Hardcastle

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was seated in the drawing-room with her husband when it was handed to her. She at once recognised the writing and she was in a critical position. She was not however, the simple girl that Battersby had known. Her experiences had altered all that. It took but a few minutes for her to make up her mind. Trembling with nervousness, but not fear, she addressed her husband.

"John," she said, "I must ask your advice on a subject which we had agreed was never more to be mentioned."

"What is it, dear?"

"I have just received this note from the man who deceived me. I met him in the city to-day, and he has evidently followed us down here. What his object is you will see from his note," and she handed it to him.

"What an infernal scamp!" exclaimed John. "He has a secret which might be of interest to me, has he?"

"What am I to do, John?"

"Let me think a minute, Alice."

For several minutes neither spoke, both being absorbed in thought. It was John who broke the silence.

"I have it, dear, that is, if you can bear to go through with your share of the plot. If not, I must think of something else."

"What do you propose?" she asked anxiously.

Quietly John Hardcastle unfolded his plan, and after thinking it over, Alice agreed.

Early next morning Mr. Hardcastle went to Birmingham. In the afternoon, the two servants were surprised by being told they could go out for the remainder of the day. The next move was to despatch a letter to the inn. The following were the contents:

"Mr. Battersby, I have received your communication. My husband left early this morning on a visit to a friend. I have sent the servants out of the way and shall be alone to-night. If you will call at eight o'clock I will discuss terms with you. Bring this note with you and come to the house as an ordinary visitor. But kindly remember to confine yourself entirely to the business which has brought you.—A. H."

When Harold Battersby read this he chuckled.

"I thought I should not have much difficulty with her," he muttered. "She is smarter than I thought, though. She wants the note back to destroy it. Well, that increases the price."

Punctual to the moment he rang the bell and was admitted by Mrs. Hardcastle who ignoring his greeting, led the way into the drawing-room. Battersby seated himself with the air of a man who has triumphed.

"Things appear to have gone well with you, Alice," he began.

"Mrs. Hardcastle, if you please, and please confine your remarks to business."

"Oh! we are coming the high and mighty game are we?" thought Battersby. "Very well, my lady, up goes the price again."

"Have you brought my note?"

"What! are you afraid of it being used as evidence against you?"

"Answer my question, please."

"Yes!"

"Very well. Now I shall be glad to hear what proposals you have to make. Be as brief as possible, as I do not want to prolong this interview."

This cool, business-like manner somewhat disconcerted the blackmailer. He had expected tears and entreaties. Instead of that Mrs. Hardcastle was much the cooler of the two.

"If you had not been so confoundedly cool I should ——"

"Confine yourself to business," interrupted Alice.

"Hang it all! What do you want me to say?"

"I want you to make any proposal you have in your mind as briefly as possible."

"Well, as I was going to say——"

"State your terms or leave!"

"Well, then, £100 now, and more when I want it," blurted out Battersby insolently.

Mrs. Hardcastle gave him a look in which she took no pains to conceal her disgust, and then she replied:

"You will probably remember that when you wrote to me after you left Watersbury you enclosed twenty pounds."

"Yes, I believe that was the amount."

"That is so. I have listened to your proposal; now you shall have my decision. I shall return you that amount, but let it be understood it is not with the object of purchasing your silence. Had you given me any address I should have returned it on the day I received it. I am only taking the opportunity now of doing what I always wished and intended to do, if ever it were possible. As for giving you anything further, you may take it as final that I have not the least intention of doing anything so foolish. The twenty pounds are your own, and I shall not give you more than that."

"So you think to get off as easily as that, do you? Then let me tell you you are greatly mistaken. Now, don't be foolish! Pay me my price, and I will leave you in peace. I would not ask you, only I am so awfully hard up."

"You have heard my decision," replied Alice coldly.

"Very well, Mrs. Hardcastle, perhaps your husband will pay to avoid his name being dragged in the dust."

"Yes, her husband will pay, and pay well!" broke in a voice from the doorway, and to Harold Battersby's surprise and dismay, there stood John Hardcastle.

That gentleman at once strode into the room, and it did not improve Battersby's state of mind to see that he carried a dog-whip in his right hand.

"Alice, leave me to settle with this gentleman," he said, and Mrs. Hardcastle left the room.

"You don't seem pleased to see me," remarked John ironically. "Well, I am very pleased to see you."

Battersby shuffled uneasily on his seat.

"Let us get to business. There's your twenty pounds for a start. Now hand over that note."

Harold Battersby's discomfiture was complete. The tables were turned upon him with a vengeance. He handed over the note and was just going to indulge in a sarcastic remark when another sight of the dog whip caused him to change his mind. John Hardcastle tore the note into fragments and flung it into the fire.

"Now, Mr. Battersby, may I trouble you to sign this?"

This was a confession of attempted blackmail.

Battersby refused.

"Very well, please yourself, my man, but the alternative is a police cell. Now then, are you going to sign?"

Battersby glanced at the face of the man opposite and decided to comply. Accordingly he affixed his

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signature to the document, remarking as he did so: "I suppose I must admit I am beaten."

John Hardcastle placed his confession in his pocket, and then coolly asked, "Is there anything more you would like to say?"

"No, I think not," feebly replied Battersby.

"I think you said you were beaten," went on John. "I agree with you. But you have another beating to take yet," and with this he pounced on Battersby and thrashed him till the coward fairly howled for mercy. That strong arm stayed not, however, until John Hardcastle was tired. Then he flung the whip aside and pointed to the door.

Harold Battersby slunk out like the whipped cur that he was, and they were troubled with him no more.

That night the train by which his smarting carcase was being conveyed from the scene of his just punishment was run into by another crossing it diagonally, the engine of the other train striking the very compartment of which Battersby was the only occupant. Several people were injured, but he alone was killed.

Next morning John Hardcastle read the report in his paper. The man had been identified by means of documents in his pockets. As he read, it came somewhat as a shock to his usually kind heart to find himself almost rejoicing in another man's death; but it was for the sake of the woman who sat opposite to him. Harold Battersby was effectually and eternally silenced; she need fear him no more.

Thenceforward the pair lived in unbroken happiness, for about this time the stern heart of the farmer, far away in that country district, softened towards his lassie, and her cup of joy was full.

Mrs. Juddenheimers: "Oh, you vas awfully ill Isaac!" Juddenheimers: "Yes, Repecca, but dere is von goot tings about it—I'm getting the vort of my money out of the doctor."

"You're beautiful!" the young man cried,
His eyes with ardour all aglow.
"Oh, say," the modern girl replied,
"Do tell me something I don't know?"

I am so weary—yet I fear to sleep!
How hard it seems to lose myself—to go
To that strange world where tyrant Dreams hold rule;
Where I may kill my friend, or wed my foe.

"You are rather hoarse this morning." "I am, and I can't account for it." "You have caught a cold, perhaps?" "To look at it in the light in which people ordinarily view it, I have, but as I haven't exerted myself in the least lately, it looks as if the cold had caught me."

"I've been taking nerve tonic," said Willie Wishington, "and it has worked first-rate, don't you know." "Indeed!" "Yes, I called on Miss Bankins last night, and the first thing her father said to me was, 'Well, young man, I like your nerve.'"

Smith: "Now, I maintain that the words 'accident' and 'misfortune,' are pretty nearly synonymous." Brown: "Oh, no, they are not. If that mother-in-law of yours fell into the river it would be an accident, but if anyone pulled her out again that would be a misfortune." Smith: "Ah! now I appreciate the distinction between the words."

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 29th. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mrs. T. Gordon, of 44 York Street, Dover, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

JIMMY: "What time do yer have ter get ter work?" Johnny: "Oh, any time I like, as long as I ain't later than seven o'clock."

EDITH: "Colonel Gore is the hero of many engagements." Helen: "Matrimonial?" Edith: "No; he hasn't courage enough for that."

PENN: "Can you suggest any way in which I might improve my new novel?" Editor: "You might put the last chapter first." Penn: "But all the characters die in the last chapter." Editor: "Yes, I know."

"MY dear," he said, with an ill-concealed ring of relief in his voice, "diamonds have gone up nearly fifty per cent. So I find the earrings I promised you will cost more than I can afford." "Oh!" she cried, "isn't it too bad?" "Yes, I am very sorry." "So am I, my dear. It's a shame that you'll have to pay more than you can afford."

CYCLIST (to sleepy-looking villager): "Are you a native of this village?" Villager: "Am I what?" Cyclist: "Are you a native of the village?" Villager: "Hey?" Cyclist: "I asked if you were a native of this place?" Mrs. Villager (appearing at the open door, acridly): "Ain't ye got no sense, Jim? He means wuz ye livin' here when yer wuz born, or wuz ye born before yer begun livin' here. Now answer 'im."

THE mayoral chair of a certain town was occupied by a gentleman of great generosity. Among the applicants who sought relief from him during his tenure of office was a well-known local character who asked the loan of a few pounds to buy a donkey and cart, and set up in the rag and bone business. "Well, Tim," said the mayor, "if I give you this money, how are you going to pay me?" This was a poser for Tim, but a thought struck him, and he blurted out: "Well, yer worship, if ye are kind enough to give me the money, I'll tell yer what I'll do—I'll name the donkey after yer worship!"

* A FRENCHMAN having eaten plum pudding for the first time was so delighted with it that he asked his English hostess for the recipe, which, of course, she gave him. He carried it home, gave it to his wife, and at the same time gave her an enthusiastic account of the delicacy. Not long afterwards the pudding came on the table in a soup tureen, and was ladled out into soup plates. "What is this, my dear?" asked the Frenchman. "Plum-pooding," answered his wife. He laughed at her, and she produced the recipe, which, as she declared, had been strictly followed, and so it had been, for the English lady had omitted all mention of the cloth. The ingredients had been put, according to directions, into a pan of boiling water, had been cooked for the prescribed time, and had come out—soup!

FOND PARENT: "No, he won't work! He never would work! He never will work! There's only one thing—he'll have to go in for the Civil Service!"

FRIEND: "Well, Doc, how's business?" Doctor "Fine. Got two new cases in the next room." Friend: "What, smallpox?" Doctor: "No, champagne."

GEORGE: "I assume to have some knowledge of women." Ethel: "I quite agree with you on that point." George: "What point?" Ethel: "That your knowledge is assumed."

"So she jilted you," said the sympathetic friend. "Yes." "Did she give any reason?" "She did. She said it was because of her philanthropic nature; that it was better to make a great many men happy by being engaged to them than to make one miserable by marrying him."

A MAN showed a lawyer a five shilling piece and asked him whether he thought it was a good one. The lawyer said that it was, put it in his pocket, said his usual fee for advice was 6s. 8d. and would the enquirer please send the balance of 1s. 8d. round to his office at his earliest convenience.

THEY watched the storm. The tempest howled and the rain dashed madly against the earth. "Darling," asked the living skeleton, "are you afraid of lightning?" The bearded lady smiled. "No," she answered confidently. "It is now well established that electricity will not remove superfluous hair." A crash of thunder made it impossible for them to resume their conversation for several seconds.

AT Blackpool the other day a rowing contest took place between crews made up of the single and married men of the town. One of the young fellows who was to row in the "single" boat on the morning of the race was asked what sort of a chance he thought his boat stood. "No earthly chance," he promptly exclaimed. "If we do win it can only be by a fluke." "How's that?" "Why," replied the joking bachelor, "don't you see we've got to row against the 'tied' all the way."

AN old lady came into a local post-office the other day and aggressively addressed the clerk thus: "How is it my son Tom, at York, hasn't got that ten shillings I sent last week?" "Really, I can't say," said the clerk. "Did you post it yourself?" "Yes, and paid you the money. I have your receipt for it." "Please let me see it," said the clerk. The old lady produced a postal order, and waved it triumphantly in his face. When it was explained that the order should have been enclosed in the letter she wasn't at all satisfied, but went out shaking her head and talking to herself.

DURING a recent case a lawyer of the bullying type was examining the prosecutor, who charged the defendent with assault and battery. Lawyer: "Where did the defendant strike you?" Witness: "He struck me on the bridge——." Lawyer (sharply interrupting): "How's that? You said a while ago that he struck you on the balcony." Witness: "So he did, sir, I am telling you no lie." Lawyer: "Did he strike you more than once?" Witness: "Only once, sir, and I was satisfied with that." Lawyer: "How, then, could he strike you on the bridge and on the balcony at the same time and with one blow?" Witness: "He did it, anyhow, sir." Magistrate (interrupting): "On what balcony?" Witness: "The balcony of the hotel, your worship." Magistrate: "But on what bridge?" Witness: "The bridge of my nose, sir. Had the gentleman waited, I'd ha' told him myself."

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WONDERS OF FACE TRANSFORMATION.

Every year thousands of new books are published. They are read and forgotten. But once in a hundred years a new book appears which THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR. It contains some new truth which alters the history of mankind. Such a book has just issued from the press. You will read it. If not to-day, then some other day, for sooner or later it will be read by all men and all women. And when you have read it your life will be altered. It will become better, happier, more joyous. The writer of the book is Professor Boyd Laynard. The name of the book is "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE." It is pronounced by the Press to be the most remarkable work of the century.

"The book is not a novel! Then who wants to read it? People only read novels and newspapers nowadays." That is what you say immediately. But for once you are wrong. At the present moment hundreds of thousands of people are turning over, and eagerly reading, the pages of this book which is not a novel. They are telling their friends about it, and very soon everyone will be reading the book that is not a novel. If you want to be interested, if you want to be instructed, if you want to live long, if you want to be healthy, if you want to be beautiful, you must read the book that is not a novel.

The first part of this remarkable book consists of a practical guide to the attainment of good looks without the aid of art. Professor Boyd Laynard will have nothing to do with powder, paint, face-washes, and the like, but gives plain instructions for the scientific cultivation of beauty. The rest of the book deals with health and long life. These chapters are of the highest value.

This remarkable handbook to the three subjects embraced in the title has been a long period in preparation by the author; being, in fact, the labour of many years of diligent research and earnest investigation. The work is arranged in 127 chapters, the whole of which (in the popular edition now offered to the public) is bound in one volume. The book, although published at Two Shillings, will, if ordered direct from the Publishers, be forwarded to readers of SHORT STORIES, carriage paid, at the low discount price of

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

Amongst the numerous subjects dealt with in Professor Laynard's work the following are but a few. A Complete Syllabus, showing the contents of the whole of the 127 chapters, enumerating upwards of **500 subjects** and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the Publishers:

The way we make our own faces—Secrets of face transformation—Changeableness of beauty and its causes—Some Strange facts concerning the variableness of beauty—"Odd-faced" beauty—The countenance the counterpart of the mind—How pleasing expressions become permanent—How a person's habitual look is acquired—How permanent expressions can be transformed—Metaphysical secrets of keeping young and preserving a youthful appearance—The author's investigations into the causes why some individuals look younger than others at a certain age—Discovery of a great metaphysical secret—Wonders of the skin—Relation of the skin to beauty—Effects of mental emotions upon the skin—Effects of heat, cold, and changes of temperature upon the skin—Bad complexions and their causes—Diet that spoils and diet that improves the complexion—General care of the complexion—Construction, growth, and wonders of the hair—Why hair falls out, and its remedy—Premature greyness: its causes and prevention—General care of the hair—Superfluous hairs and how to treat them—Wrinkles: their prevention and treatment—Freckles, tan, and blackheads—Oily skin, dry skin, and loose skin—How the nose can be improved—Protruding ears and their treatment—Offensive breath—Anatomy of the teeth—Why teeth decay—General care of the teeth—Tallness, and how to attain it—Round shoulders and how to cure them—How to acquire a full chest—Perfect form and figure: their proper proportions—Thinness, and its treatment—Excessive stoutness—Care of the hands—Care of the feet—Physiognomy; or, the art of reading character from the face—Mental influences upon health—Power of the mind over the body—Influence of the mind in curing diseases—How the mind can cause dyspepsia—Effect of the direction of thought to the heart—How real diseases often supervene upon fancied ailments—How violent passions injure health—Laughter as a medicine—Ailments cured by laughter—Wonders of digestion—Relative value to our bodies of the principal articles of food—Fruits and vegetables as medicine: their various influences upon the physical system—Health preserving diet and its consistency—Diet favourable to mental exertion and intellectual culture—Influence of various foods upon our passions and propensities—The influence exerted by the mind upon the appetite and digestion—Some perilous articles of food—Light, and its influence upon health—Exercise and its relations to health—Baths and bathing: their influence upon health—The marriage state, and its influence upon health—Statistics showing the comparative vitality of married and single persons—100 professions, trades, and occupations: their respective influences upon health and long life—Sleep, and its relation to health—Insomnia, and its treatment—The eyes, and how to preserve them—The ears and hearing: how to prevent deafness—The voice: its cultivation and preservation—Memory, and how to improve it—Sudden failure of memory—Rules for cultivating the memory—Effect of some foods upon memory—Stammering, and how to cure it—Prevention of disease—Nervousness—Blushing: its physiology and treatment—Rules of life for attaining longevity—How to live to a hundred—Premature old age and its causes—Short biographies of 30 modern centenarians, whose ages range from 115 to 185 years—General principles that can be laid down for the anticipation of longevity—The eight signs of long life.

Professor Boyd Laynard has indeed acted wisely in issuing a popular edition of the work, at the low price of one shilling and sixpence, which brings it within the reach of all. It will be forwarded for the sum named, carriage paid, to any reader of SHORT STORIES. Kindly fill up the order form printed below, and send in at once with remittance.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

In next week's number will be commenced a splendid series of stories, entitled:

"The Adventures of an Actress."

As I told you last week, these tales will deal with the career of Hazel Harlow, an innocent, young, and beautiful country girl. They will recount the many temptations that beset her, and her triumphant issue from them pure and unspotted. The seamy side of stage life will be vividly exposed, and revelations of a startling character will be made.

In view of the tremendous rush which such a series is bound to cause, it is imperative that you should order your copy beforehand. You can do this by filling in this form and handing it to your newsagent:

Please reserve for me a copy of *Short Stories* dated August 10th.

Name.....

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.....

Here is a pleasant letter from "S. P.," of Gaisford Road, Kentish Town:

"Just a word *re Short Stories*. I was recommended to take this in by a friend, and did so. Since then I have persuaded four of my friends to follow my example. I read the whole of the story, 'The Fate of Michael Standridge,' and a very interesting story it was. But the new one, 'The Golden Dwarf,' fairly (to put it in slang) 'takes the cake.' All my friends are simply mad over it.'

Which just shows the value of recommendation. Would that all my readers would follow the example of my correspondent, and get their friends to read the paper.

❦❦❦

Apropos of "The Golden Dwarf," I have received the following from Miss Louie Spencer, who has been appearing recently at the Grand Theatre, Leeds, with great success:

"As an old subscriber and admirer of your charming little paper, *Short Stories*, I venture to point out a slight mistake in the new serial story, 'The Golden Dwarf.' The hero says he visited the theatre and followed the sorrows of Eily in *The Shaughraun*. Now, Eily is the heroine in *The Colleen Bawn*—the chief feminine parts of *The Shaughraun* being Moya, Claire, and Arte O'Neal.'

I am much obliged to Miss Spencer for the correction.

❦❦❦

Another criticism of "The Golden Dwarf," but not a very serious one. "J. G.," having pencilled the names of seventeen characters on the back of a postcard, intimates that it is "too great a strain to remember them all."

For which I am sorry—for "J. G." For if the remembering of seventeen characters in a story is beyond his mental capacity his loss is considerable. It is quite a reasonable number, as he will see on comparing "The Golden Dwarf" with any novel of Dickens or Scott, or any play of Shakespeare, or for that, most of the novels or plays of note. In "The Golden Dwarf" the characters are so cleverly differentiated that no difficulty should be experienced in following the parts they take in the story.

❦❦❦

"Eccentric."—Any man who desires to do so may easily become ambidextrous. All he has to do is to begin and systematically use his left instead of his right hand whenever it is possible. The ambidextrous man not only has the advantage over his opponent in sparring and all athletic sports, but he has a great advantage over others in games of skill, in almost any kind of business, and is a better man all round. The one-handed man is a one-sided man. The muscles on the right side of the right-handed man become developed at the expense of the muscles of the other side; that shoulder becomes higher, and the man grows lopsided.

To avoid this ought to be the effort of every youth, for then the muscular habit is formed. The difficulty may be corrected in some degree, however, by systematically using the left, or weaker hand and arm. Keep your keys and things in your left-hand pocket, reach for things with your left hand, pick up weights with your left. You will be astonished to see how rapidly your hitherto neglected member can be brought into active and useful service.

LATEST NEWS.

In the event of any important news arriving when the paper is going to press it will be found in this space.

Newsagents' shops will be besieged by people ordering next week's *Short Stories* containing "Adventures of an Actress."

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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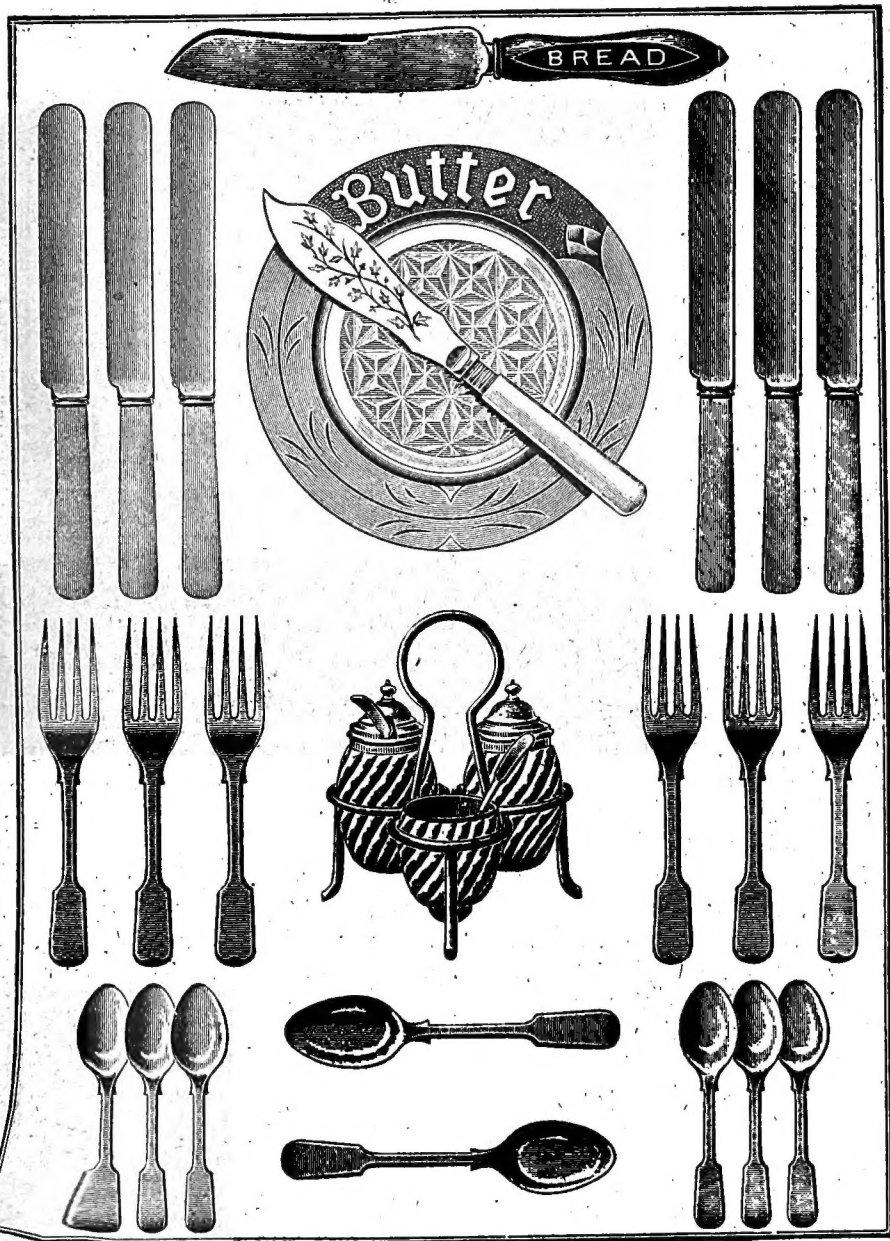

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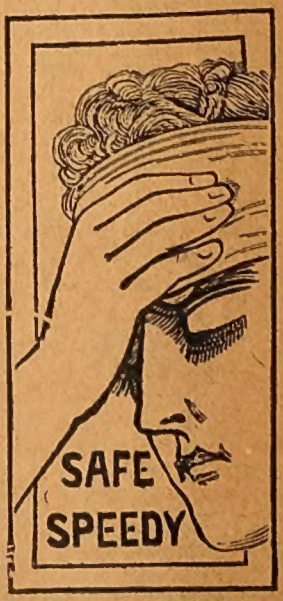

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